ERN RAMPE

THE CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DE DÉVELOPPEMENT SOCIAL

POLICY CONCEPTS

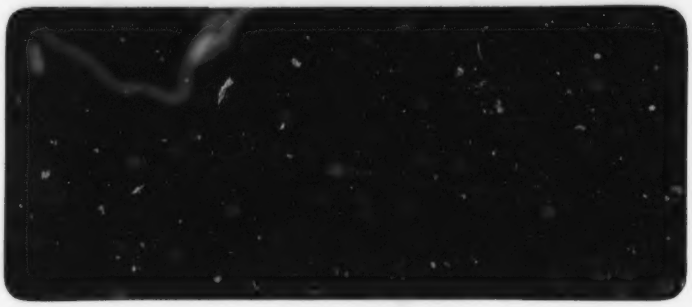
THE COOPERS & LYBRAND CONSULTING GROUP

Employability Resources Network

The Employability Resources Network (ERN) is a three-year demonstration project funded by Employment and Immigration Canada under the Innovations program.

ERN is the responsibility of three organizations: The Canadian Council on Social Development, The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group, and The Norton Group.

ERN's purpose is to explore and evaluate methods for helping unemployed people get off social assistance and back into the job market, through employability programs currently under way across Canada.



ERN will select at least 10 to 15 demonstration projects for an in-depth evaluation of the different approaches used to help social assistance recipients and others re-enter the labour force. It will assess the projects' effectiveness for different groups, such as older unemployed workers, women, native people, disabled persons, visible minorities and youth.

ERN will establish a standardized framework for evaluating employability enhancement projects. The framework will provide useful information not only for government policy-makers, but also for business, social service and employment agencies, and program administrators.

ERN will develop an information resource centre. It will include an inventory of national and international employment projects, an evalution data base and a documentation library. A communications network will serve organizations and individuals in the employment enhancement field.

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Demonstration Evaluation: Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group
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Ressources pour l'amélioration des possibilités d'emploi

Le projet Ressources pour l'amélioration des possibilités d'emploi (RAMPE) est un projet témoin d'une durée de trois ans financé par Emploi et Immigration Canada dans le cadre du programme Innovations.

Trois organisations assument la responsabilité de RAMPE : le Conseil canadien de Développement social, Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group et Le Norton Group.

Le mandat de RAMPE est d'explorer et d'évaluer, dans le cadre de programmes d'amélioration des possibilitiés d'emploi ayant cours dans l'ensemble du Canada, différentes formules pouvant aider les chômeurs à se soustraire à l'aide sociale et à réintégrer le marché du travail.

RAMPE sélectionnera dix à quinze projets témoins pour évaluer minutieusement les différentes stratégies favorisant la réinsertion des assistés sociaux et d'autres personnes sur le marché du travail. Il appréciera l'efficacité des projets visant différents groupes tels que les chômeurs d'un certain âge, les femmes, les autochtones, les handicapés, les minorités visibles et les jeunes.

RAMPE élaborera un schéma d'évaluation destiné aux projets d'améloiration des débouchés. Ce schéma fournira des renseignements utiles non seulement aux décideurs politiques du gouvernement, mais aussi aux entreprises, aux organismes de services sociaux et d'emploi, et aux administrateurs de programmes.

RAMPE créera également un centre national de documentation. Celui-ci comprendra l'inventaire des programmes d'amélioration des perspectives d'emploi mis en place au Canada et à l'étranger, une base de données sur l'évaluation et un centre de documentation. Un réseau de communication sera à la disposition des organismes et des particuliers qui s'occupent de l'amélioration des perspectives d'emploi.

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91-03630/

REPORT ON THE EVALUATION STUDY OF THE CYCLEBREAK I AND II PROJECTS

October, 1990

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Published 1991.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Cyclebreak Project is a 12 week project with long-term follow-up designed to break the cycle of dependence for 17-22 year olds on income assistance.

Between May and September, 1990, under the auspices of the Employability Resources Network (ERN) Initiative, this project was evaluated. The purpose was to determine "What Works for Whom?": to provide an understanding of what features of the Cyclebreak Project "work" or "do not work" in meeting its basic objectives.

Project Goals and Objectives

The principal goal of Cyclebreak is to assist a group of youth, aged 17-22 in breaking the cycle of dependence which they have developed on income assistance. Our review of project literature revealed an absence of specific written objectives, however, discussions with project staff resulted in the identification of the following objectives:

- participants will begin to break the cycle of continuing dependence on income assistance projects;
- participants will be able to set realistic employment goals;
- participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to keep jobs;
- participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to find jobs; and
- participants will be able to access job skills training or academic project more easily.

Among the ERN demonstration projects being evaluated Cyclebreak is unusual in that it is being operated by a for-profit agency: Tully and Company Ltd.

Clientele

The Cyclebreak project was established in response to evidence of higher than average unemployment rates of youth in the downtown Vancouver area. All potential participants must reside within a central geographic location, be 17 to 22 years old, and have a history of

dependence on foster care or income assistance.

Operation (Project Design)

The Cyclebreak Project has involved two primary phases. Based on the lessons learned in Cyclebreak I modifications were made to the project and it was renamed Cyclebreak II.

All potential participants are initially screened to determine whether they meet the basic requirements of the project and then interviewed to screen for job readiness. Those clearly not prepared for the job market are screened out.

The basic elements of the Cyclebreak Project include the following:

- Four weeks of classroom sessions involving pre-employment and lifeskills training.
- Four weeks of job placement arranged for each student according to their areas of interest. Participants are paid $10.00/day in training allowance which is linked directly to their punctuality and attendance at the placement.
- Four weeks of job finding skills training after the job placement ends.
- Long-term Job Keeping Support which gives past participants of the project on-going access to the job-finding infrastructure developed in the Tully and Company offices.

The Cyclebreak Project includes a staff of four. The budgets for the Cyclebreak I and II Projects were, respectively, $239,000 and $200,000 per year.

Issues and Conclusions

The conclusions associated with each of the seven evaluation issues researched in this evaluation are summarized in the exhibits on the following pages.

Issues and Conclusions

Issue	Conclusions
1. Did the Cyclebreak Project assist participants in: • obtaining employment; and • maintaining employment?	The contribution of the Cyclebreak project was not in educating participants to obtain general employment. Instead, the project significantly assisted participants in: maintaining employment and finding more attractive employment.
2. Did the Project strengthen the participant's sense of employment readiness?	We found that the project improved participants' ability to deal with all barriers to finding employment. Cyclebreak staff did not play a primary role in assisting participants in making the career decision to pursue further education.
3. Did the Cyclebreak Project end/reduce the participant's dependence on income assistance?	Questionnaire data reveals that more than half of Cyclebreak participants over the six month period after the project broke their dependence on income assistance. For those that continued to receive income assistance, the amount received did not change significantly. From comparison group data, we noticed no major differences between the comparison group and Cyclebreak participants in the pattern of decline in the percentage of individuals receiving income assistance.
4. Did the Cyclebreak Project improve the participant's financial situation?	The project was somewhat successful in raising the level of income of participants. For about half the participants the project contributed to a marginal increase in income. However, for a number of reasons a greater number (33) of participants tended to feel financially better off after the project. We concluded that the hourly wage of participants following project participation provided a positive financial inducement for single persons, but not single mothers, to stay off income assistance.

5. What were the costs of the project compared to social assistance?	A rough comparison of Cyclebreak with other projects suggests that Cyclebreak is not very cost-effective.
6. What program interventions contributed most to increasing employability?	The in-class portion of the project contributed significantly to enhancing participants' job search skills, building self-confidence and motivation, and providing participants with a better understanding of how to handle work situations. Although, the four week job placement component had a high rate of completion only a relatively small percentage of participants obtained a paid job from it. The overall job search services provided by the project were regarded as useful and important by project participants. In class job search training was seen as less useful. Follow-up counselling was one of the more effective components of the project. "Business mentors" was not a successful feature of the project. The considerable time and resources spent by the project on Physical Activities is not justified by the benefits it provides.
7. How did the "for profit" objective of the delivery agency influence the effectiveness of the Project?	The project was less successful in providing an acceptable "return on investment" (ie. income assistance savings) to government funders. The "for-profit" nature of the delivery agency: • appears to positively affect project effectiveness; • fosters grater responsiveness to changing financial circumstances; and • can create concerns about the sharing of the "revenue pie". These concerns have not affected Cyclebreak project delivery.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The recommendations derived from our review of the seven evaluation issues are outlined in the exhibit on the page opposite. The exhibit also outlines some of the key lessons we learned from this evaluation.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

Recommendations

1. Cyclebreak Project officials should collect in a more systematic / consistent manner data on the follow-up counselling they provide and its corresponding employment related effects.

2. Performance indicators need to be established for the Cyclebreak Project based on discussion between project officials and MSS&H.

3. Objectives should be established for the project under its current funding arrangements with MSS&H.

4. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on enhancing the effectiveness of the job placement component of the project to the meet a number of objectives:

5. In conducting evaluations of employability enhancement projects like Cyclebreak, efforts should be made to collect comparison group data.

6. The Physical Activities component of the project should be reduced in size, but not completely eliminated.

Lessons Learned

For projects in the Vancouver area marketing efforts are important to ensuring that a steady stream of individuals apply for entry.

A resolution of the competing pressures faced by Cyclebreak and its operating agency regarding project delivery perspectives is required. These perspectives are focused on:

- **The participants** - Cyclebreak staff perceived a "human services" focus to their project because what they considered as most important for participants' future well being is the achievement of long-term lifestyle and behaviour/attitude changes in participants.

- **The funders** - The current funder, MSS&H, expects to see participants reduce dependence on income assistance and corresponding by increase their level of employment. From a business vantage point Tully and Company must pay due regard to the "employment focus" desired by MSS&H.

1.
INTRODUCTION

The Cyclebreak Project is a 12 week project with long-term follow-up designed to break the cycle of dependence for 17-22 year olds on income assistance. The Project has been evaluated under the auspices of the Employability Resources Network (ERN) Initiative. This report, prepared by The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group which also conducted the evaluation assessment, presents the results of the evaluation study of the Cyclebreak Project.

Purpose of the Study

An Evaluation Assessment of the Cyclebreak Project was carried out in March, 1989. Consistent with The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group (CLCG) and ERN approach to carrying out evaluation activities, this assessment provided the basis for the evaluation study which was conducted between May and September, 1990.

The purpose of the study was to define "What Works for Whom?" for the Cyclebreak project; a question of central importance to the ERN Initiative. Based on an assessment of seven issues identified during the Evaluation Assessment, this Evaluation Study provides an understanding of what aspects of the Cyclebreak Project "work" or "do not work" in meeting its basic objectives.

Evaluation Objectives

Pursuant to the Evaluation Assessment and a decision by the ERN Evaluation Steering Committee, seven issues were determined to be of central importance in evaluating the Cyclebreak Project. These issues are outlined in Exhibit 1 below, together with the quality of data used in assessing each issue.

Exhibit 1:

COVERAGE OF ISSUES
FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE
CYCLEBREAK Project

ISSUES	DATA COVERAGE
1. Did the Project assist the participants in: - obtaining employment - maintaining employment	H
2. Did the Project strengthen the participants' personal sense of employment readiness?	H
3. Did the Project end or reduce participants' dependence on income assistance?	H
4. Did the Project improve the participants' financial situation?	L
5. What were the costs of the Project compared to income assistance?	M
6. What Project interventions contributed most to increasing employability?	H
7. How did the "for profit" objective of the delivery agency influence the effectiveness of the Project?	M

Coverage:
H = High
M = Medium
L = Low

Structure of the Report

This report is structured in the following manner:

- **Background**
  - Mission statement, objectives and benefits of ERN initiative.
  - Cyclebreak Project objectives and a brief description of the Project's operations/activities.
- **Study Design**
  - Describes how the data for the evaluation study research were collected and analyzed.
- **Facts, Findings and Conclusions**
  - Outlines for each evaluation issue and research question the salient facts, findings and conclusions reached.
- **Recommendations**
  - Outlines the recommendations arising from our facts, findings and conclusions.
- **Conclusion**
  - Provides an overall conclusion to the study.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Ms. Betty Tully, President, Tully and Company and the staff of the Cyclebreak Project. Ms. Tully was helpful in providing an overview of the Project while her staff assisted in collecting data required for the study. We would also like to thank all the participants in responding to our questions during interviews and the telephone survey.

Finally, we appreciated the efforts of the Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSS&H) in providing aggregate income assistance data. We would like to extend our thanks to Mr. Ron Willems, Director Income Assistance Division and Mr. Bill Warburton, Economist of the British Columbia Ministry of Social Services and Housing for providing us with the aggregate income assistance data. This information enhanced measurably the quality of data available for our analysis of the Cyclebreak project.

2.
BACKGROUND

Mission Statement of Employability Resources Network (ERN)

The Employability Resources Network (ERN) was undertaken to identify and promote effective ways of helping employment disadvantaged persons return to active participation in the labour market.

Objectives of ERN

The objectives of ERN are the following:

- To determine, through a comprehensive evaluation of a variety of initiatives, what approaches to enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers, work best for whom.

- To demonstrate and test, using financial and technical assistance, approaches that are vital to enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers.

- To develop and maintain a central information clearinghouse of employability enhancement techniques and materials. Contained in the clearinghouse are descriptions of Canadian and international projects and projects, contact people, evaluations and bibliographies.

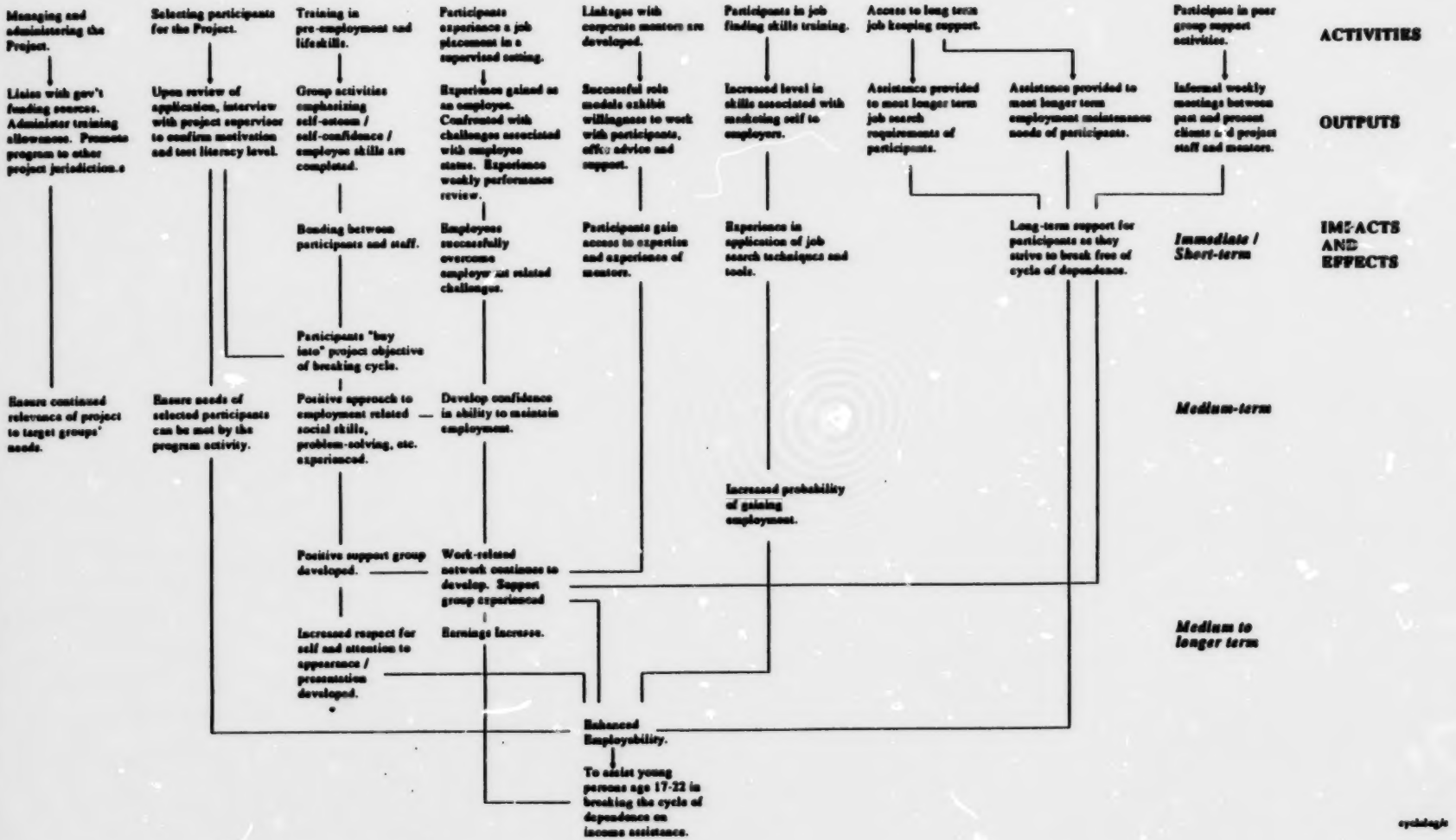
- To synthesize recent experience and recommend to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (funder) and other governments, effective approaches for enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers.

Benefits of ERN

ERN has been designed to provide a "return" in the form of information and assistance to key stakeholders. They include Employment and Immigration Canada, other labour market or social service departments, projects being evaluated and demonstration projects, as well as communities, groups and individuals working or interested in the training and human resource development areas.

- Projects being evaluated will benefit from the objective examination of their services and outcomes for participants. Where appropriate,

Exhibit 2: Project Logic Model Cyclebreak


Managing and administering the Project.
Selecting participants for the Project.
Training in pre-employment and lifeskills.
Participants experience a job placement in a supervised setting.
Linkages with corporate mentors are developed.
Participants in job finding skills training.
Access to long term job keeping support.
Participate in peer group support activities.
ACTIVITIES
Liaise with gov't funding sources. Administer training allowances. Promote program to other project jurisdictions.
Upon review of application, interview with project supervisor to confirm motivation and test literacy level.
Group activities emphasizing self-esteem / self-confidence / employee skills are completed.
Experience gained as an employee. Confronted with challenges associated with employee status. Experience weekly performance review.
Successful role models exhibit willingness to work with participants, offer advice and support.
Increased level in skills associated with marketing self to employers.
Assistance provided to meet longer term job search requirements of participants.
Assistance provided to meet longer term employment maintenance needs of participants.
Informal weekly meetings between past and present clients and project staff and mentors.
OUTPUTS
Bonding between participants and staff.
Employees successfully overcome employment related challenges.
Participants gain access to expertise and experience of mentors.
Experience in application of job search techniques and tools.
Long-term support for participants as they strive to break free of cycle of dependence.
Immediate / Short-term
IMPACTS AND EFFECTS
Participants "buy into" project objective of breaking cycle.
Ensure continued relevance of project to target groups' needs.
Ensure needs of selected participants can be met by the program activity.
Positive approach to employment related social skills, problem-solving, etc. experienced.
Develop confidence in ability to maintain employment.
Medium-term
Increased probability of gaining employment.
Positive support group developed.
Work-related network continues to develop. Support group experienced
Increased respect for self and attention to appearance / presentation developed.
Earnings increase.
Medium to longer term
Enhanced Employability.
To assist young persons age 17-22 in breaking the cycle of dependence on income assistance.
cyclebrgk

suggestions for alternate approaches or changes will be made.

- Senior governments will receive a synthesis of findings from evaluations, literature review and contacts with the employment community that will help in policy formulation and project development.

- Interested parties will also have access to a national clearinghouse of information on employment projects, projects, contact persons, and evaluations that will help in preparing funding submissions and in improving the quality of their services.

- Selected demonstration projects will be assisted to test innovative approaches.

Overview of Cyclebreak Project - Operations and Activities

This overview is drawn (with minor cosmetic modifications) from the Evaluation Assessment of Cyclebreak. Exhibit 2 presents the Project Logic model agreed upon during the Evaluation Assessment which sets out the activities and goals / objectives of the Cyclebreak Project.

The Cyclebreak Project has involved two primary phases: Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II. Based on the lessons learned in Cyclebreak I modifications (to be described later in this section) were made to the project and it was renamed Cyclebreak II. The primary modification was the removal of 4 weeks job search training from the end of the project and the insertion of individual job search counselling when required as well as job search training in the first four weeks.

Among the ERN demonstration projects being evaluated Cyclebreak is unusual in that it is not being operated by a not-for-profit organization but instead, by a "profit-oriented" company: Tully and Company Ltd.

PRINCIPAL GOAL

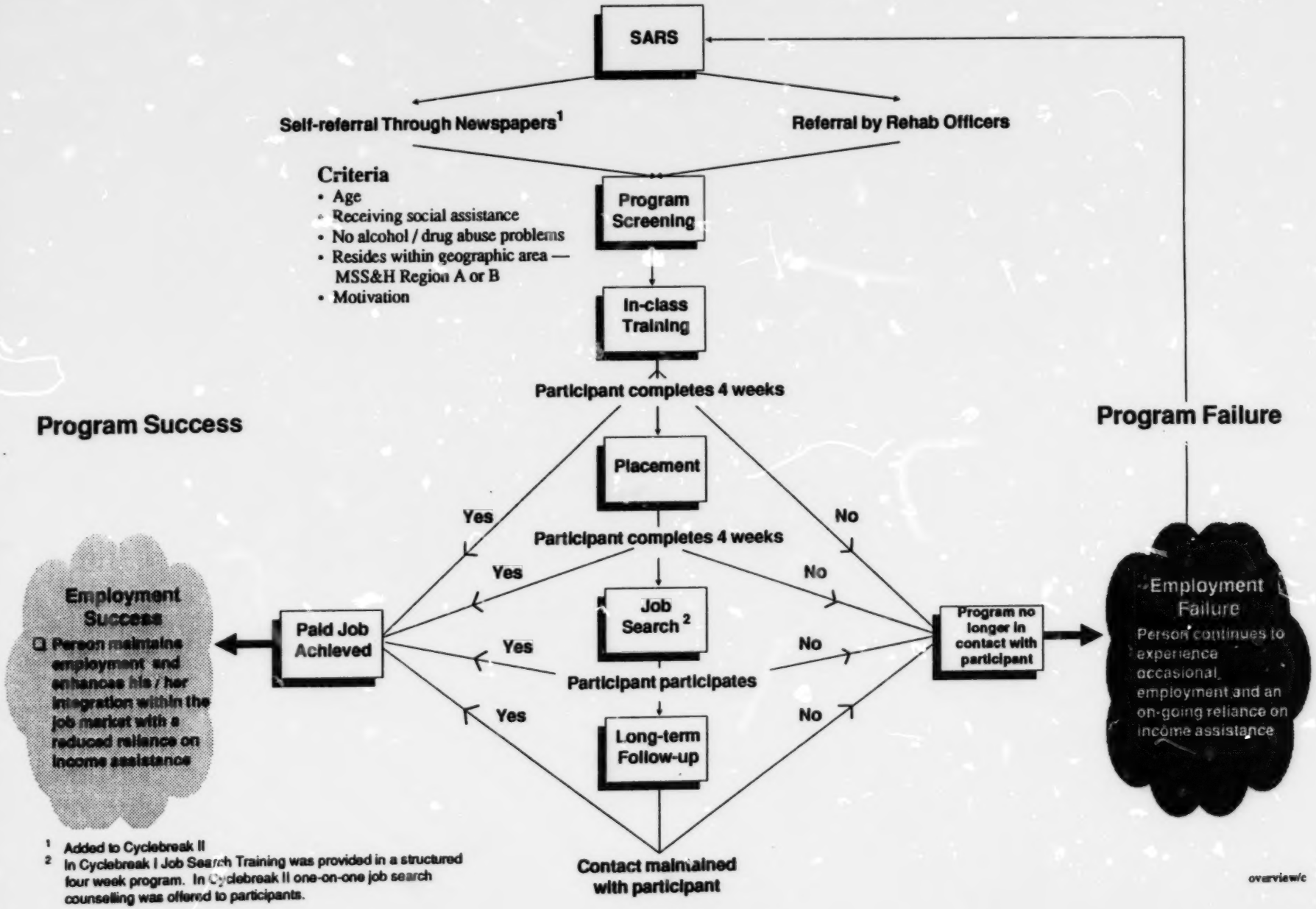
The principal goal of Cyclebreak is to assist a group of youth, aged 17-22 in breaking the cycle of dependence which they have developed on income assistance.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

We noted that in the curriculum for the in-class portion of the project, objectives are identified for each class module. However, our review of project literature revealed an absence of specific written objectives for the Cyclebreak projects as a whole. Discussions with Project staff resulted in the identification of the following objectives:

- **participants will begin to break the cycle of continuing dependence on income assistance projects.** The expectation is that participants will reveal a reduced dependence on income assistance following project participation;

Exhibit 3 — Overview of Cyclebreak I and II Programs



[1] Added to Cyclebreak II

[2] In Cyclebreak I Job Search Training was provided in a structured four week program. In Cyclebreak II one-on-one job search counselling was offered to participants.

overview/c

- **participants will be able to set realistic employment goals;**

- **participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to keep jobs.** Primarily, this involves participants demonstrating improvements in job keeping skills as a consequence of project participation;

- **participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to find jobs.** Principally, this involves participants showing improvements in job finding skills; and

- **participants will be able to access job skills training or academic projects more easily.** In this regard, the primary components are to refer participants to these projects; to give participants more knowledge about what additional educational projects are available to them; and to make them more motivated to access these resources because they have a "right" to do so.

Project DESIGN

An overview of the Project Design for the Cyclebreak I and II Projects is outlined in Exhibit 3.

Participants are recruited through a newspaper advertisement and through referrals from British Columbia Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSS&H) Rehabilitation Officers and Social Workers. All potential participants are initially screened to determine whether they meet the basic requirements of the project. This involves the use of the following kinds of criteria:

- geographic location;

- between the ages of 17 and 22; and

- have a history of dependence on foster care or income assistance.

They are also assessed based on their work record and past experience with other training projects.

Following this screening, prospective clients are interviewed by project staff, in part to assess their attitudinal and motivation levels, and then complete a written literacy test. Applicants are screened for job readiness and those clearly not prepared for the job market are screened out.

The basic elements of the Cyclebreak Project include the following:

- **four weeks of classroom sessions involving pre-employment and lifeskills training.** The specific curriculum consists of instruction in such areas as communication skills, goal setting, problem solving, nutrition, work relationships, reflections on self, marketing skills and others. During this four week period the participants are also involved in the following activities:

  - Psychological Testing;

- Physical Activities such as visits to the theatre, sports and hikes;

- Taking Care of Business which provides participants with one half day per week to attend to personal matters (e.g. paying bills);

- Peer Group Activity which is a Wednesday evening gathering of participants' peers, Cyclebreak staff, mentors and past participants; and

- Business Mentors, who are professional and business persons that volunteer their time to participate in Cyclebreak Project activities, particularly a panel discussion during the third week of the course with youths who are employed (usually past participants) and current participants of the project.

- **Four weeks of job placement is arranged for each student according to their areas of interest.** Participants are paid $10.00/day in training allowance which is linked directly to their punctuality and attendance at the placement.

- **Participants are scheduled for four weeks of job finding skills training** after the job placement ends. During this phase of the project participants continue to receive $10.00/day in training allowance and receive instruction in areas such as the following: developing a skill profile, identifying career goals, resume preparation, completing employment applications, interview preparation, and researching the job market. The length of this phase may vary since the participant's involvement will terminate once he or she obtains employment or employment related training.

- **Long-term Job Keeping Support** gives past participants of the project on-going access to the job-finding infrastructure developed in the Tully and Company offices. Participants are invited to keep in touch with the project staff and, if required, to utilize the desk space, telephone and secretarial support to assist in subsequent job searches. Limited one-on-one counselling, as required, is also available to participants during this component of the project.

Based on the experience gained from the Cyclebreak I phase of the project a number of modifications were implemented in the second phase (known as Cyclebreak II). These modifications included the following:

- The removal of 4 weeks job search training from the end of the project and the insertion of individual job search training in the first four weeks.

- Using referrals generated from newspaper advertisements, as well as MSS&H;

- Providing General Equivalency Diploma (GED) Tutoring;

- Establishing a closer working relationship with participants' Rehabilitation Officers and Social Workers;

- Increasing the training allowance from $8.00 per day to $10.00 per day; and

- Making efforts to expand the Peer Group Activity to include a ten day wilderness retreat.

Resources

The resources used for Cyclebreak were categorized into the following:

- **human**, which includes the President of Tully and Company Ltd., a Project Supervisor and two instructors/counsellors. As indicated above the project also utilizes mentors/volunteers from the business community; and

- **financial**, which included the contract monies received from Employment and Immigration Canada and the Ministry of Social Services and Housing.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Cyclebreak comprised 4 staff who were collectively responsible for classroom time with the participants and one-on-one counselling, as well as involvement in the Peer Group support activities and in the Physical Activities. These included the following:

- **President of Tully and Company Ltd.**: primarily responsible for the overall administration of the project. She was attempting to reduce her overall participation in classroom activities to a 50% level. Marketing of the Cyclebreak project was a priority for the President, which included establishing/marketing the project in other jurisdictions or cities.

- **Project Supervisor**: supervised other project staff, recruited participants and mentors, instructed in the classroom and arranged job placements.

- **Instructors/counsellors (2)**: primary facilitators of the classroom activity, and responsible for all aspects of the curriculum. They also had responsibilities for one-on-one counselling, job placement support, peer group activity, physical activity and GED tutoring.

Cyclebreak periodically contracted the services of a Vancouver-based psychologist for the purpose of administering the California Psychological Inventory Test to each of the project participants. The psychologist was also closely involved in the design of the project, by virtue of her detailed understanding of the characteristics of the Cyclebreak target group, as well as the body of literature in the area of employability enhancement.

As indicated above, the project also relied on professional and business persons who have volunteered their time to act as "Business Mentors" for the project. During one six month period this involved a pool of eight (8) mentors.

In Cyclebreak I, the human resources involved also included the services of a contracted evaluator.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Cyclebreak I had gross project costs of approximately $239,000 for the period October '87 to October '88. This phase of the Cyclebreak Project was sponsored and funded by Employment and Immigration Canada as an Innovations project. Second phase activities of the project for the six months period October 1988 ending in March 1989, operated under "bridging" contract revenues of $100,000 received from the Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSS&H) Regions A and B. From April 1, 1989 to March 31, 1990, the Project received $200,000 in operating revenues from MSS&H. From April to August of 1990 Cyclebreak operated under "bridging" financing of $100,000 as a precursor to negotiations on financing for an additional operating year. We were recently informed that an agreement was reached between Tully and Company, and MSS&H for financing of $200,000 for the period August 1990 to August 1991.

Our Approach to Evaluating the Different Activities and Operations of Cyclebreak

Our goal in evaluating Cyclebreak was to determine how effective it was (what works for whom) in meeting the stated project objectives. Recognizing that changes have occurred in the project we distinguished whenever necessary and possible between Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II. We wished to determine if the changes resulting in Cyclebreak II achieved improvements in the performance of the project.

Exhibit 4: Issues Covered by the Lines of Evidence

ISSUES	LINES OF EVIDENCE					
	Focus Groups	Interviews	File Review	Aggregate Data	Survey of Placement Hosts	Telephone Survey of Participants
1. Did the Program assist the participants in obtaining and maintaining employment?			✔			✔
2. Did the Program strengthen the participants' personal sense of employment readiness?	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
3. Did the Program end or reduce participants' dependence on income assistance?				✔		✔
4. Did the Program improve the participants' financial situation?		✔	✔			✔
5. What were the costs of the Program compared to income assistance?		✔		✔		✔
6. What Program interventions contributed most to increasing employability?	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
7. How did the "for profit" objective of the delivery agency influence the effectiveness of the Program?		✔		✔		✔

overview/c

3.
STUDY DESIGN

The study design involved the gathering of data on multiple lines of evidence including the following:

- focus group discussions;
- interviews with Cyclebreak staff, with Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSS&H) officials and officials from other employability enhancement projects in the Vancouver area;
- a review of files;
- aggregate data provided by MSS&H;
- a survey of placement hosts; and
- a telephone survey of past participants of the project.

Exhibit 4 identifies for each issue assessed in this study the lines of evidence utilized.

Focus Groups

A short focus group discussion was held with each of two groups of individuals from the Cyclebreak project: participants (12) who had been out of the project for some time and participants (6) who had just completed the in-class training component.

The focus groups provided qualitative information on Issue 2 (employment readiness) and 6 (project intervention).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with six officials of the Ministry of Social Services and Housing (including the Area Manager) to gain an understanding of the referral process of income assistance recipients, and perceptions of the project's effectiveness. Two interviews were conducted with each of the three Cyclebreak officials to understand how the project has evolved and gain their insight on its contribution towards employability enhancement. Finally, interviews were conducted with personnel from other employability enhancement projects in the Vancouver Area including Richmond Youth Services and Hal Kline & Associates. This provided a source of comparative information on Cyclebreak.

Interviews provided information on Issues 2 (employment readiness), 4 (financial situation), 5 (costs), 6 (project interventions) and 7 (profit objective).

File Review

A review was conducted of 50% (60 out of 119) of all project files. The review distinguished between Cyclebreak I (23 out of 46 files) and Cyclebreak II (37 out of 73 files). See Volume II Technical appendices for a copy of the file review guide.

The file review allowed us to gain information on the following areas:

- what kind of income assistance support participants were receiving (dependent, independent or child care) when they applied for entry to the Cyclebreak Project;
- age;
- grade levels achieved;
- what components of the project were completed by participants;
- the type of jobs participants were placed in and whether the placement led to permanent employment;
- background information on individual's barriers to employability and any available information on the wages received from paid employment.

The information on age, grade and income assistance status was self-reported. Interviews with the Supervisor of the Cyclebreak Project (who revealed considerable knowledge of Cyclebreak participants) provided additional information and also confirmed that self-reported data was reliable.

The file review provided data on Issues 1 (obtaining/maintaining employment),2 (employment readiness), 4 (financial situation), and 6 (project interventions.

Aggregate Income Assistance Data

We contacted Mr. Ron Willems, Director of Income Assistance, in the central MSS&H office in Victoria to request access to the Ministry's income assistance data base.

To facilitate this request we received Cyclebreak project approval to provide the Ministry with a list of participants for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II. In developing the list it was necessary to establish a project "end date": three months after the start. Cyclebreak staff emphasized that data generated from this end date "would not reflect the effects of long term follow-up which they regarded as an integral component of the project".

The data was provided to us by MSS&H in aggregate form to protect the confidentiality of individuals' income assistance history.

In brief, the procedure followed in generating the data involved the following steps:

- from the list of participants for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II, income assistance files were accessed to identify those who received assistance after the project;

- the files provided information on the following characteristics: age; marital status; whether the individuals were classified as unemployable; and income assistance history (the number of months benefits were received in the previous 25 months); and

- these characteristics were then used to match participants with comparable individuals who had not been involved and were currently not involved in training projects.

Based on the procedure followed by the MSS&H, we are satisfied that the comparison and participant groups are comparable.

We tracked both groups over different periods of time depending on whether they were Cyclebreak I or Cyclebreak II participants.

We did not include in these time periods the three months of project participation since we wished to assess the effect of this participation on reducing the dependence of individuals on income assistance.

Volume II Technical Appendices provides a more detailed description of the comparison group and selection procedures, as well as the data provided.

The data distinguished between Cyclebreak I and II and allowed us to assess effectively Issues 3 (dependence on income assistance), 5 (costs) and 7 (profit objective).

Survey of Placement Hosts

We administered a short questionnaire (see Volume II Technical Appendices) to eight employers to gain primarily qualitative information on the project and the skills, experience and qualifications required of participants.

The survey allowed us to assess Issues 2 (employment readiness) and 6 (project interventions) with specific reference to the effectiveness of placements.

Telephone Survey of Participants

A telephone survey of past participants was one of the primary sources of data for this evaluation. A total of 37 participants were surveyed.

Prior to administering the survey, the consent of each participant was obtained. This required Cyclebreak staff to expend considerable effort in contacting each Cyclebreak participant. We, as a result, achieved a very high response rate to the survey (88%).

Since this method did not result in the random generating of completed questionnaires, the results from the questionnaire cannot be considered fully representative of the whole Cyclebreak participant population. In part, this explains the occasional differences evident between the questionnaire results and those from other lines of evidence.

The questionnaire used (see Volume II Technical Appendices) was modified and agreed to through discussions with Cyclebreak staff. In addition, a pre-test was conducted with a sample of participants to ensure it was correctly written and formatted.

The telephone survey provided data on Issues 1 through 6 in the Evaluation Study.

Measuring Project Success

To evaluate the Cyclebreak Project, it was necessary to understand what constituted a "success". A basis for assessing success is usually found in the ability of a project like Cyclebreak to meet specified objectives.

As indicated earlier, no formalized objectives are contained in Cyclebreak documentation, however, five objectives were confirmed in discussions with project staff.

Within the limits or parameters of the analysis of the seven issues researched in this evaluation study, the success of Cyclebreak in meeting all five objectives was assessed. Considerable depth of analysis was possible on the following 3 objectives:

- participants will begin to break the cycle of continuing dependence on income assistance projects;
- participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to keep jobs; and
- participants will be able to demonstrate the skills necessary to find jobs.

Less coverage was possible on the remaining two objectives:

- participants will be able to set realistic employment goals; and
- participants will be able to access job skills training or academic projects more easily.

4.
FACTS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Characteristics of Cyclebreak Participants: "The Cycle of Dependence"

Before discussing the facts, findings and conclusions of this study it is important to identify the basic characteristics of the target population for Cyclebreak, as well as how the cycle of dependence on income assistance functions for this group. These characteristics will provide a useful reference point for discussion of **what works for whom?**: the key question to be answered in ERN evaluations of this kind. As indicated earlier, a key objective of this evaluation is to determine in what ways the Cyclebreak Project has or has not been effective in enhancing the employability of 17-22 year olds in the Vancouver area.

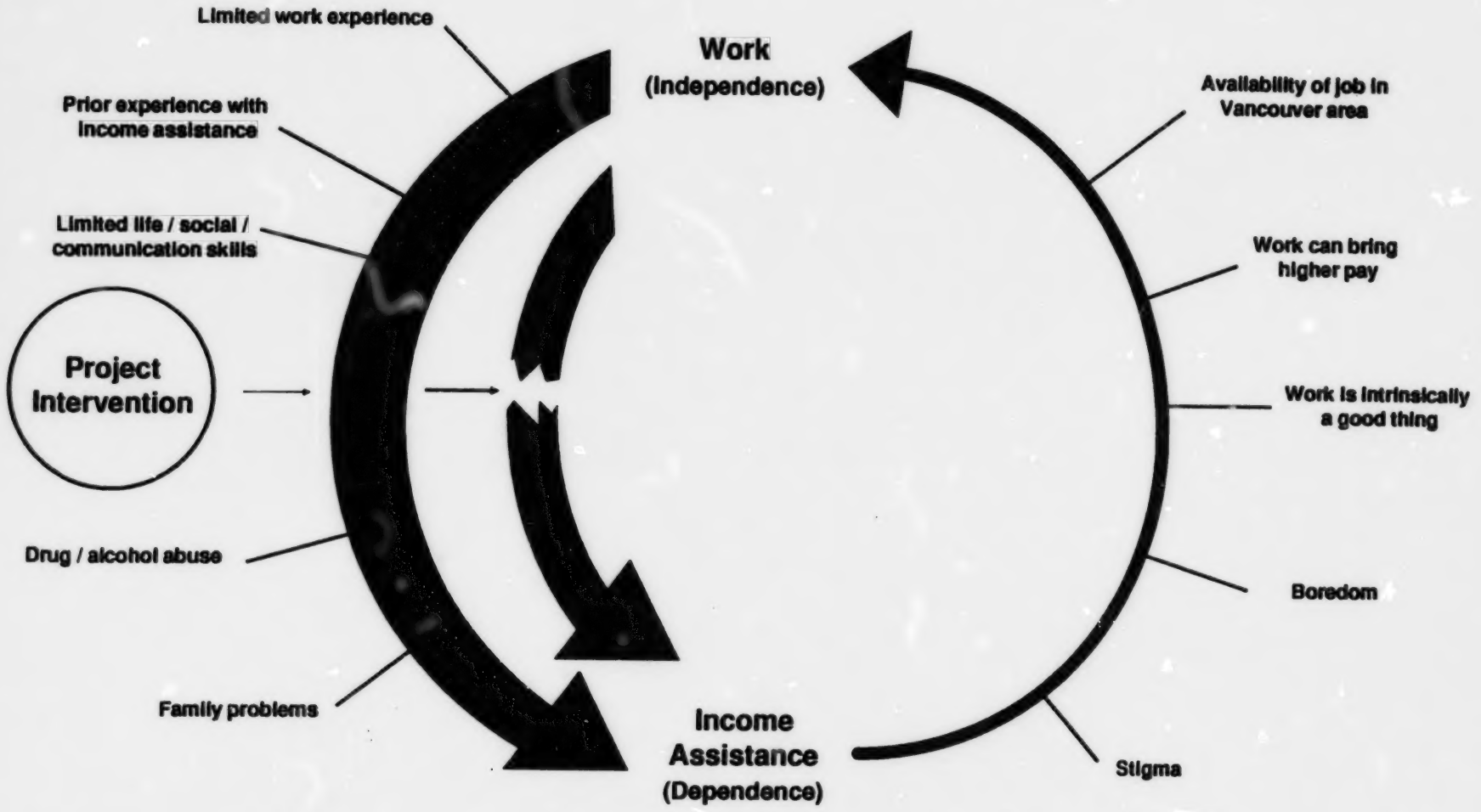
From the file review, interviews and focus group discussions we were able to identify the following basic characteristics of the Cyclebreak target group:

- In Cyclebreak I and II there was an equal balance between men and women: 52% men and 53% men in Cyclebreak I and II, respectively.
- The vast majority of participants in the project were single and without children.
- Most participants (77%) were 19-22 years old. Because of their age the majority (95%) at the time of project entry were eligible for and were receiving their own income assistance from government.
- A large proportion (74%) of participants were high school drop-outs. There were no differences in numbers between Cyclebreak I and II.
- Of the drop-outs 74% were within 1 or 2 years of gaining their grade twelve diploma. Cyclebreak I had a slightly higher percentage (82%) of participants in this category compared to Cyclebreak II (68%).

Overall the difficulties the Cyclebreak target group experienced in keeping employment were due to factors such as:

- limited work experience preventing them from finding a better paying job. Participants might find a job but after a short period of time would leave it in part, because they did not consider it a suitable start to their

xhibit 5 — The "Push" and "Pull" of Forces for and Against Independence / Work



overview/c

career or they had difficulty handling the work responsibilities;

- prior experience with social welfare agencies gained through their parents;
- lack of motivation, in part brought about because of:
  - ingrained leisure habits;
  - low self-esteem arising from receiving income assistance; and
  - being drop-outs from school.
- limited skills development;
- in some cases drug and alcohol abuse; and
- family problems.

These difficulties contributed to reinforcing a cycle of dependency on income assistance. The cycle is based on the continued "push" and "pull" of conflicting forces (described in Exhibit 5) causing individuals to constantly go on and off income assistance, and enter and re-enter the job market. Difficulties like those identified above (represented by the large downward pointing arrows) threaten to pull an individual back into a reliance on income assistance. However, Project interventions (represented by the circle) can assist the individual in resisting the downward pull of these difficulties. Positive forces (represented by the upward pointing arrows) can then push the individual towards a long term involvement in the work environment. These forces include:

- The availability of jobs. Since Cyclebreak II began, the Vancouver economy has expanded and entry-level jobs have become easier to find. This was somewhat less evident during the period for Cyclebreak I.
- The perception that work can bring higher pay (income assistance doesn't pay enough);
- Work is intrinsically a good thing as compared to income assistance, and can lead to the development of a career;
- Participants, after receiving income assistance for a while, begin to feel their lifestyle is boring and they would like to do something interesting; and
- The negative stigma associated with receiving income assistance.

Findings and Conclusions

The remainder of this section presents our findings and conclusions with respect to each of the seven evaluation issues.

Exhibit 6: Cyclebreak Participant Employment - Comparison Before and After

Obtaining Employment	**Before**	**After**
% who obtained jobs	**92%** (34/37)	**89%** (33/37)
Cyclebreak I	**N/A**	**74%**[1]
Cyclebreak II	**N/A**	**57%**[1]
In six month period % who obtained jobs	**40%**	**N/A**
% whose placements lead to a wage earning job:		
Cyclebreak I	**N/A**	**27%**[1]
Cyclebreak II	**N/A**	**32%**[1]
Employment Status of Job:		
Full time	**41%** (15/34)	**82%** (27/33)
Part time	**51%** (49/34)	**18%** (6/33)
Permanent	**38%** (13/34)	**72%** (26/33)
Temporary	**29%** (10/34)	**15%** (5/33)
Seasonal	**15%** (5/34)	**3%** (1/33)
Casual/on-call	**18%** (6/34)	**3%** (0)
Maintaining Employment		
% holding		
one job	**20%** (3/15)[2]	**56%** (18/32)
two jobs or more	**80%** (12/15)[2]	**44%** (14/32)
mean number of jobs held	**2.3**[1] (n=15)	**1.7** (n=32)
median months working at job	**3.0** (n=13)	**8.0** (n=29)

[1] File review data

[2] Statistics refer to the six months period before Cyclebreak. Questionnaire data reveals that the large majority of survey respondents have been out of the program 5 months or more

ISSUE 1

Did the Cyclebreak Project assist participants in:

- **obtaining employment; and**
- **maintaining employment?**

Conclusion

The contribution of the Cyclebreak project was not in educating participants to obtain general employment. Participants already possess these skills since 92% of participants obtained jobs before Cyclebreak compared to 89% after.

Instead, the project significantly assisted participants in:

- maintaining employment. The median months working at a job increased from 3.0 to 8.0 months.

- finding more attractive employment. A larger percentage of participants were employed full time (82%) after the project compared to 41% before.

Issue Focus

This issue addresses the primary goal of all employability enhancement projects: whether a participant's employment potential is improved. For Cyclebreak one way "employment potential" can be measured is by examining whether participants exhibited a stronger employment history after participation compared to before. For Cyclebreak participants we considered "success" to be linked to a change in their employment pattern.

The target group for Cyclebreak typically experiences intermittent employment in entry level jobs and seasonal/casual employment, involving types of employment ranging from labouring, dishwashing, sales work, and construction. We, therefore characterized a positive change in the employment pattern of Cyclebreak participants in the following manner:

- an increase in the number of participants who found employment after the project;

- a significant number were able to maintain employment for a longer period compared to before the project; and

- an increase in the number of individuals employed in permanent, not casual or seasonal jobs (ie. they were employed in more "attractive" jobs after the project.)

Since the assessment of employment patterns relates specifically to finding and maintaining a job, we assumed this was covered by the research questions on these job characteristics. The following question is, therefore, not assessed in this report: **Is there a change in employment pattern for successful participants?**

Exhibit 6 presents the pattern participants exhibited in obtaining and

maintaining employment, before and after project participation.

Findings

How many participants subsequently found work?

We recognize that a requirement of entry to the Cyclebreak Project is that an individual be on income assistance. We have assumed therefore that 100% of all participants at the time of entry to the project were unemployed.

Although participants were unemployed at the time of the questionnaire survey, they revealed an ability to find jobs both before and after participation in the project. As shown in Exhibit 6 a similarly high percentage of individuals (92% before - 89% after) obtained employment before and after the project. The results suggest that participants joining the project were employment ready: capable of finding general employment.

Data obtained from the file review tends to support these results. A significant number of participants who started the project found jobs afterwards: 74% and 57% of participants for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II, respectively. These percentages included those participants who obtained jobs through work placements.

The decline in percentages between the two projects cannot be explained by economic circumstances (Vancouver's economy was expanding during Cyclebreak II). Within the limits of the data on barriers for Cyclebreak I and II participants, there was no indication that the barriers faced by the latter group were any more severe. Barriers are therefore not an explanatory factor. One possible explanation is that there was a difference in the recall of the supervisor regarding jobs obtained in Cyclebreak II.

Generally our research indicated that the primary difficulties faced by participants were not in obtaining employment, but in:

- maintaining employment (see Issue 3 for additional information);
- obtaining more attractive positions which fit their skills and career interests (see Issue 3).

Regarding the latter point, we determined that the project provided direct assistance to participants in helping them find more attractive positions. This, combined with job search training provided, permitted participants to obtain more attractive, better employment. The following points should be considered:

- For 27% of participants from Cyclebreak I and 32% from Cyclebreak II the job placements lead to a wage earning job. Although the quality of data in the file review on the types of jobs participants obtained is low, it appears that the jobs were at better places of employment than

was previously experienced. The project, therefore, provided participants with a "leg-up" in the job market by gaining their entry to better employment which their own job search efforts might not have permitted them to achieve.

The above conclusion is corroborated by our interviews and focus group discussions, as well as the file review which showed that the other participants who did not get a job from the placement, but found a job after Cyclebreak, tended to revert to the same quality of job they had before they joined the project.

- As Exhibit 6 indicates, the employment status of participants significantly improved after Cyclebreak. Eighty-two percent of participants were in full time jobs after the project compared to 41% before: A significant improvement. Similarly, a much higher percentage of individuals were in permanent employment after (72%) the project compared to before (38%).

- For the first job participants held after leaving Cyclebreak, 20 (61%) reported that they secured this job as a result of a project lead and another participant (3 %) reported that the job was a direct result of the Cyclebreak job placement. The remaining participants reported that they found their first job through a friend or relative (6, 18%), their own efforts (5, 15%) or other means (1, 3%). Interviews, as well as the survey data presented suggest therefore, that in the majority of cases Cyclebreak staff directly assisted respondents in obtaining employment.

How many successful participants maintained employment?

There was considerable improvement evident in participants' ability to maintain employment. In particular, Exhibit 6 shows that the median months participants worked at a job more than doubled, from 3.0 months before to 8 months after.

In addition, the mean number of jobs held by participants decreased after Cyclebreak, and a much higher percentage of individuals (36% after compared to 20%) before held only one job.

The survey data also showed that in the six months before Cyclebreak only 40% of participants held jobs. Recognizing that before participation individuals were successful obtaining employment, this statistic suggests a highly intermittent pattern to participants employment situation before Cyclebreak.

Is the project success rate higher than in a comparable group?

We were not able to obtain data from a comparison group to assess the relative success of the Cyclebreak Project interventions.

Interviews were conducted with staff of the Richmond Youth Services Agency in

Richmond, a community adjoining Vancouver. However, the level of comparability between the target group of the interventions offered by this agency, the manner of data collection and the differing methods of project implementation did not make it a suitable organization to compare with Cyclebreak.

From the interviews we identified three key factors/criterion linked to the success of a project like Cyclebreak. The first is the quality and commitment of a project's personnel towards fostering change in the employability of youth. Cyclebreak staff exhibited a high degree of professionalism and were successful in establishing good rapport with participants. This rapport was important to the development of a bond between staff and participants to allow for successful classroom instruction and one-on-one counselling, whenever it was required.

The second criterion for success concerns how well structured the project was. The effectiveness of a project like Cyclebreak is dependent on a close link between the capabilities of staff and the appropriateness / effectiveness of the interventions relative to the target population. This issue is covered in detail in the discussion of Issue 6.

The third criterion for success relates to the ability of youth directed employability projects to attract candidates who are sufficiently job ready so that a structured project like Cyclebreak can have a demonstrable impact on them.

Cyclebreak staff indicated that this has been an ongoing difficulty experienced by the project particularly in Cyclebreak II.

ISSUE 2

Did the Project strengthen the participant's sense of employment readiness?

Conclusion

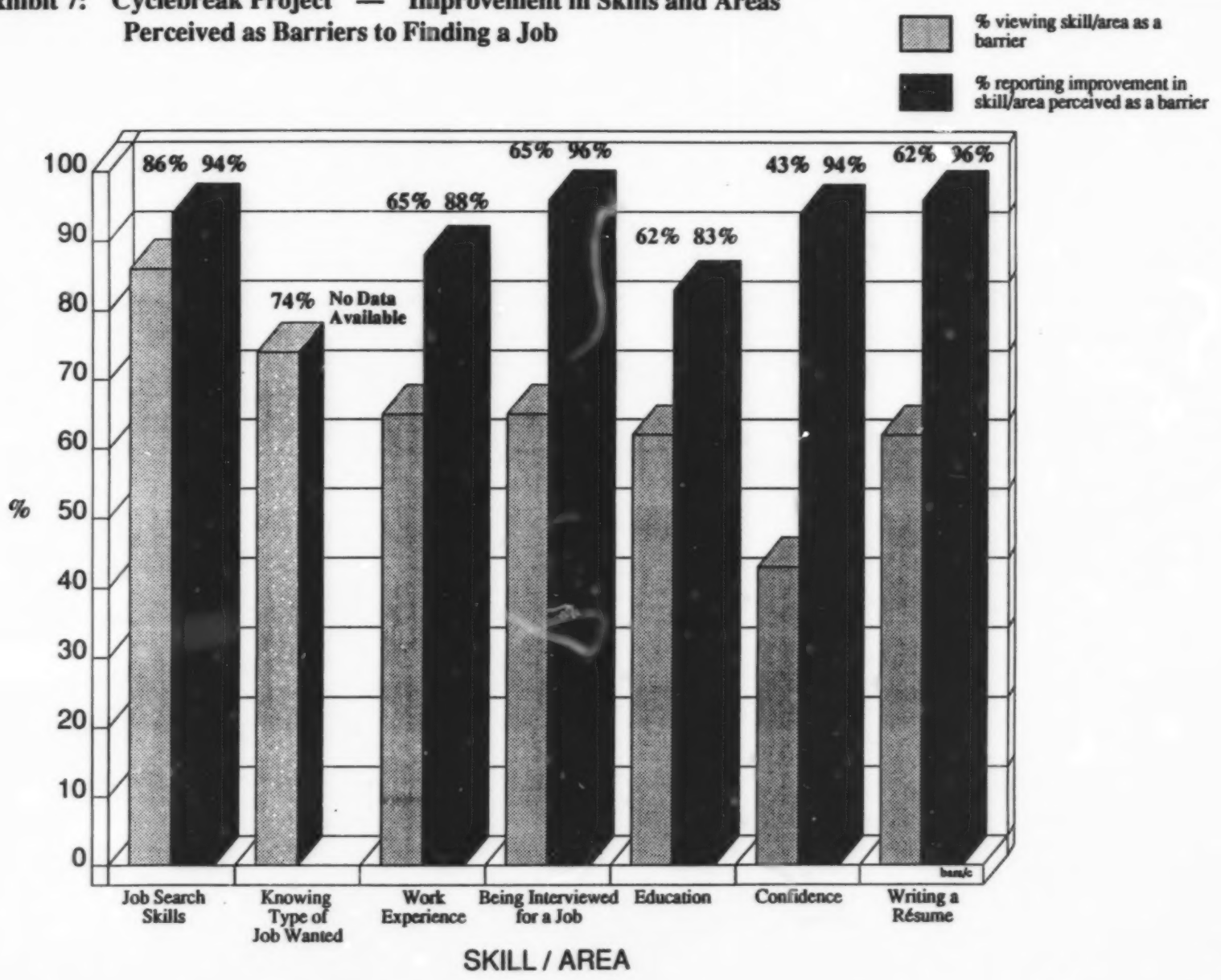
Cyclebreak participants regarded the lack of job search skills and the ability to know what kind of job they want as key barriers to finding employment. This points to their need to obtain vocational counselling. Appropriately enough, counselling is an area of concentration for project staff.

We found that the project improved participants' ability to deal with all barriers to finding employment.

The amount of pay was perceived by participants as the primary barrier to keeping employment. We concluded the project was effective in reducing this barrier because it resulted in participants achieving a higher standard of income than can be achieved from dependence on income assistance.

Those participants who regarded confidence, the ability to handle job responsibilities, and personal problems as barriers to keeping a job perceived improvement in their ability to deal with them.

Exhibit 7: Cyclebreak Project — Improvement in Skills and Areas Perceived as Barriers to Finding a Job



Cyclebreak staff did not play a primary role in assisting participants in making the career decision to pursue further education.

Issue Focus

This issue examines a fundamental concept of employment enhancement projects, that it is not sufficient to provide a client with skills, it is necessary to change the client's perceptions of his/her own employment readiness. Often, clients of employability enhancement project have experienced a series of failures which foster a negative self-image. In the evaluation we examined the areas perceived as barriers to employment by participants of the Cyclebreak Project and whether the participants felt the project resulted in an improvement in these areas. We reasoned that perceived improvement in these areas would result in an improved sense of employment readiness. Our rationale was that improvement would make the possibility of **sustained** employment "real" for the participant, thereby enhancing his/her overall sense of employability.

Findings

What changes do participants report?

Do participants as a result of the Project demonstrate:

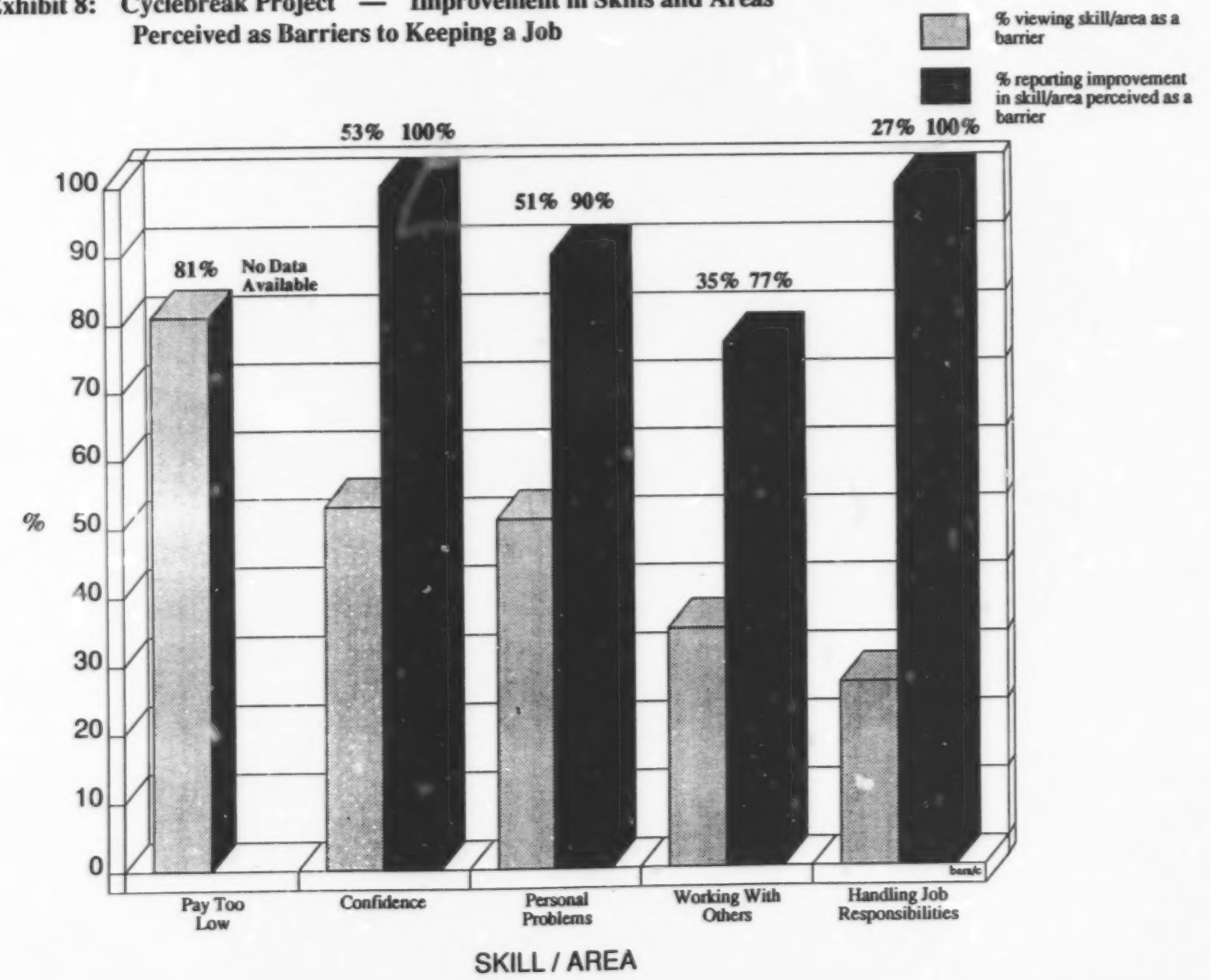
- **an enhanced self-image;**
- **initiatives directed at self-improvement; and**
- **improvements in skills and the ability to deal with barriers to employability?**

We addressed this question by examining what skills or factors were perceived by participants as barriers to finding and keeping a job. We then examined whether the project resulted in a perceived level of improvement by participants in these skills or factors.

We first assessed factors or skills considered barriers to finding a job by participants. Exhibit 7 outlines our findings. With the exception of confidence (43%), 60% or more of participants perceived the remaining factors identified in the exhibit as at least somewhat of a barrier. The largest percentage of participants (85%) viewed their lack of job search skills as a barrier to finding a job. The next largest group saw the type of job they wanted to obtain (74%) as a barrier. The latter barrier points to a need on the part of these participants for vocational counselling, both on a one-to-one basis and in classroom sessions.

In order to determine whether participants perceived any improvement in these areas we assessed the responses of participants who viewed an area as somewhat of a barrier (rated 3 on a 5 point scale) to major barrier (a 5 on the 5 point scale). Exhibit 7 outlines the percentage of these participants who

Exhibit 8: Cyclebreak Project — Improvement in Skills and Areas Perceived as Barriers to Keeping a Job



reported finding the project somewhat helpful (3 on the 5 point scale) to very helpful (5 on the 5 point scale). For all the job finding skills or factors listed in the exhibit 83% or more respondents reported that they perceived an improvement as a result of the project. We were unable to determine what percentage of respondents felt they had clarified their vocational goals. The results show that participation in Cyclebreak fostered a perceived improvement in factors or skills previously felt to be barriers to finding employment.

Our findings relating to factors perceived as barriers to keeping a job are highlighted in Exhibit 8. It is significant to note that the most frequently cited factor as a barrier to maintaining employment is the perception by respondents that pay levels are too low. Eighty-one percent of participants cited low pay as a barrier. However, from focus group discussions, we noted that an important reason participants entered the project was because they wanted to get off income assistance due to the low standard of living it afforded. Clearly Cyclebreak participants maintained high expectations about the amount of pay he should receive which exceeded what they had received from previous jobs. Survey questionnaire data did not permit us to identify the hourly wage individuals wanted.

The remainder of the skills or factors listed in the exhibit were not regarded by a majority of respondents as barriers to employability. This included, confidence, personal problems, working with others and handling job responsibilities.

Using the same method described above, we assessed the views of those respondents who perceived certain factors or skills as somewhat to a major barrier to keeping a job and examined the percentage who reported that the project was somewhat to very helpful to them in improving these areas. Exhibit 8 reveals that all (100%) respondents who perceived their level of confidence and inability to handle job responsibilities as barriers reported that the project assisted them in improving in this area. In addition 90% of the individuals who viewed personal problems as a barrier perceived improvement.

No questionnaire data was available concerning perceptions about wages or pay. However, we would expect that participants would perceive improvement in this area for the following reasons:

- the average reported hourly wage was $7.62 at the first job held after Cyclebreak. We indicated in Issue 4 even the minimum wage in British Columbia ($4.75) provides a better income for single people (a percentage of Cyclebreak participants) than what can be gained from income assistance; and

- thirty-three (89%) respondents reported they felt better off financially at the time of the survey than in the six months before Cyclebreak.

A review of project files and focus group discussions revealed conflicting information about a key barrier to employability: confidence/self esteem. Unlike the survey questionnaire the files and group discussions revealed that one of the most important barriers to employability was low confidence and self-esteem caused by the lack of success individuals had with the job market, as well as their current reliance on income assistance for financial support. Interviews and focus groups revealed that most individuals were interested to varying degrees in removing themselves from a perceived "rut" in their lifestyle. The strength of their interest coupled with the presence of other barriers were deciding factors in determining whether the project was able to achieve a lasting improvement in the level of individuals' employability.

Our assessment is that, with regard to the barrier "confidence", file review focus group and interview results should take precedence over questionnaire data. All available knowledge on employability enhancement points toward the validity of this assessment.

In focus groups the barriers to employment participants perceived the project had addressed effectively included the following:

- **confidence, self-esteem**: The project has placed considerable emphasis on this area. This is primarily through the positive attitude of staff towards participants;
- **lack of goals or career plan**: In a focus group conducted with past participants of the project, the largest number of individuals (5 out of 10) believed the project gave them an opportunity to find out what they did or did not wish to do. Three individuals considered the project useful in assisting them to get a job. These attitudes were attributable primarily to the in-class instruction received and the job placement;
- **work experience**:
- **motivation**: attributed to the in-class portion of the project;
- **interview skills**: attributed to the in-class portion of the project;
- **social and communication skills**: addressed by in-class instruction, but also covered in a less structured manner by the physical activities component of the project.
- **hygiene and nutrition**: attributed to the in-class portion of the project;
- **physical appearance**;
- **résumé writing**: attributed to the in-class portion of the project.

The focus group and the file review indicated that important barriers to preventing individuals' keeping a job even after they left the project were the following:

- **fear of success**: interviews with Cyclebreak staff officials and the placement questionnaire indicated that some individuals would start out very successfully at a job, but at some point jeopardize their employment situation through inappropriate behaviour;

- **lack of motivation**: some individuals have not reached the stage in their cycle of dependence where they may be sufficiently motivated to try remaining in the job market, notwithstanding the efforts of Cyclebreak staff.

- whether they liked the job environment and/or people at the job;

- problems at home;

- personal appearance, such as obesity or poor grooming;

- drugs/alcohol abuse; and

- legal problems.

How many participants pursued other/training, further academic training?

We found that a relatively small percentage of participants (12 or 32%) pursued additional training or educational training after completing the Cyclebreak project.

A review of the Cyclebreak files corroborates this conclusion. Only four out of 60 (7%) participants ended up taking further training (e.g. academic upgrading) after leaving Cyclebreak.

The much lower number of participants identified as taking training in the file review compared to the questionnaire may, in part, be explained by the lack of detailed follow-up information acquired on past participants. We noted that the files do not keep a consistent record of information gained from follow-up contacts with participants.

As part of the goal setting exercise conducted in the classroom, participants were encouraged to think about their career options, which included the pursuit of further education. It was the perception of project staff that the experience gained with the job market from the work placement and other jobs obtained after the project, may motivate some participants to pursue further education.

It was not evident from our interviews that project staff assisted participants in preparing for General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exams. Cyclebreak II included as an additional component the provision of GED tutoring. However no Cyclebreak II participants from the file review took further training.

Our general assessment was that Cyclebreak staff did not play a primary role in the decision of participants to pursue further education.

ISSUE 3

Did the Cyclebreak Project end/reduce the participant's dependence on income assistance?

Conclusion

Questionnaire data reveals that more than half of Cyclebreak participants over the six month period after the project broke their dependence on income assistance.

On average all participants received about $210.34 less per month in the six month period after the project compared to before. However, for the 18 participants who continued to be dependent on income assistance after the project the average amount of income assistance received did not change significantly ($22/month difference).

Comparison group data obtained for this evaluation raises concerns about the impact of the Cyclebreak project, and employability projects in general, in reducing dependence on income assistance. We noticed no major differences between the comparison group and Cyclebreak participants in the pattern of decline in the percentage of individuals receiving income assistance.

The body of knowledge and experience on employability enhancement suggests that a project with a comprehensive approach to job placements can achieve a demonstrable effect in reducing dependence on income assistance. Cyclebreak staff may, therefore, wish to expend greater effort on this component of their project.

Whenever feasible, evaluations of projects like Cyclebreak should include comparison group data to arrive at conclusions on impacts and cost-effectiveness.

Issue Focus

Another goal of employability enhancement projects is to enable participants to end their dependence on assistance. When evaluating the Cyclebreak Project we considered not only whether participants were on assistance, but whether their reliance on assistance as a source of income had changed or shifted from one type of financial assistance (e.g. income assistance) to another (e.g. unemployment insurance).

Findings

Did participants receive less social assistance after the project than before?

According to project staff, all participants were recipients of income assistance before entering Cyclebreak. The mean social assistance participants reported they received per month in the six months before Cyclebreak was $406.25. Since this is close to the average amount ($410.00) per month Ministry of Social Services and Housing indicated income assistance recipients receive, we have a certain level of confidence about the

reliability of the self-reported data from the questionnaire.

At the time of the survey, slightly more than half (19, 51%) of these respondents reported that they were not receiving social assistance in the six months after Cyclebreak. Correspondingly, 19 (51%) respondents reported that their main source of income was from wages. Another two (5%) respondents reported that they were relying on their savings as a principal source of income, and one (3%) participant cited a training allowance. Another listed "other" as his/her source of income.

Of the remaining 14 respondents, 9 (24%) continued to depend on social assistance as their primary source of income. Another 5 (14%) listed unemployment insurance as their primary source of income.

On the basis of this limited data it was not possible for us to determine whether there was a transfer of the government financial burden for social assistance from provincial income assistance to federal unemployment insurance.

The average amount of income assistance (N=37) survey respondents reported receiving after Cyclebreak was $195.91 per month. This was $210.34 per month less than the amount of income assistance payments received b fore the Project. These results include the 19 respondents who did not receive any social assistance after the project.

For the 18 respondents who continued to receive income assistance following project participation, the average amount of income assistance received did not change significantly. The mean monthly payment received after was $428.56 compared to the $406.25 we reported earlier that participants received ($22/month difference).

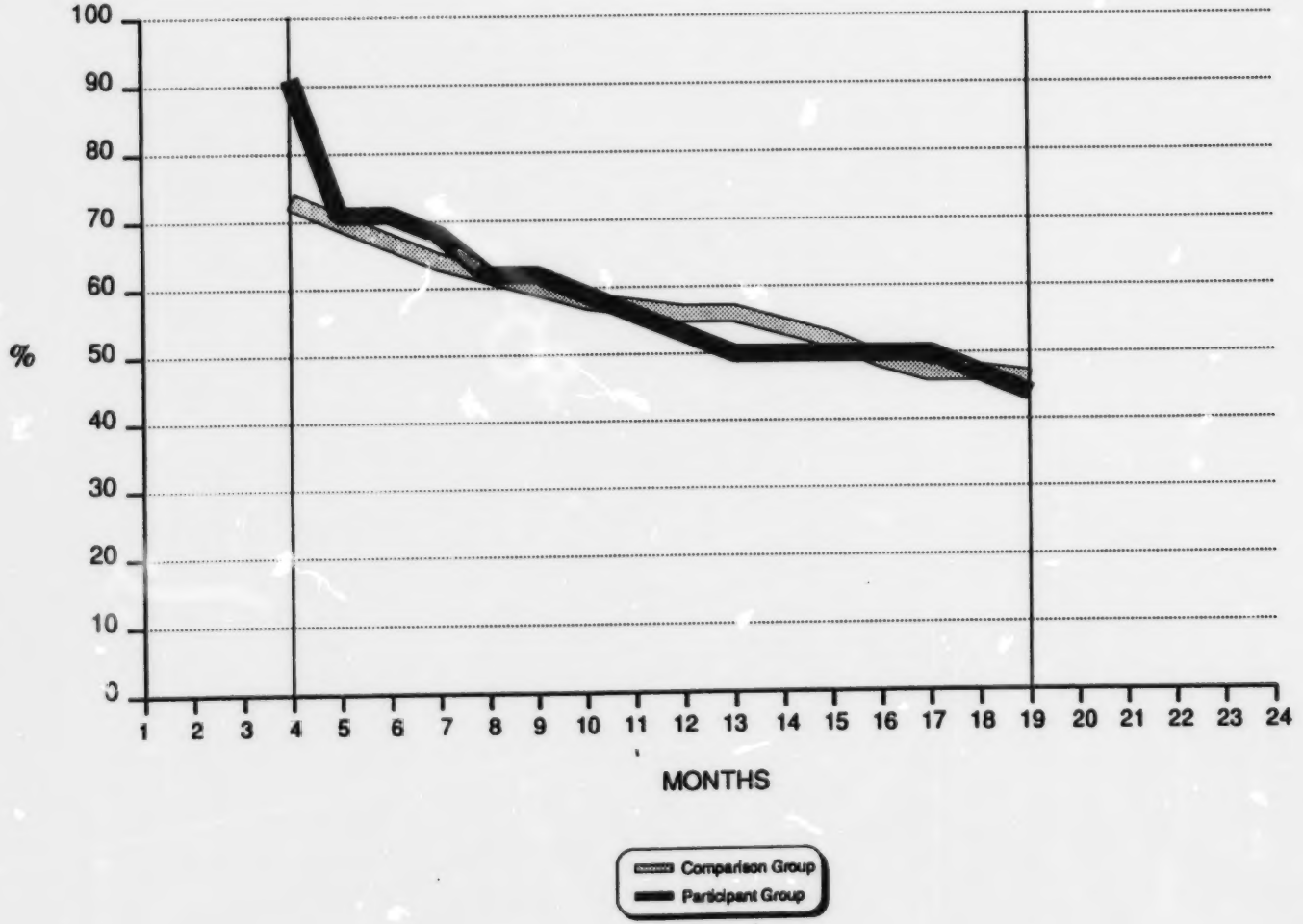
The results outlined above suggest that the project contributed to reducing the number of individuals on assistance, and reducing the total amount of income assistance payments made to Cyclebreak participants.

What was the level of assistance received by a comparable population?

As we indicated above, half of the survey respondents were no longer depended on social assistance six months after the project. The question that remains is whether or not this change would have occurred in the absence of the project.

Comparison group information has frequently been unavailable to us during the conduct of our evaluations. However, in this case the British Columbia Ministry of Social Services and Housing (MSS&H) provided us with aggregate income assistance data for 67 Cyclebreak participants, 34 from Cyclebreak I and 33 from Cyclebreak II. As indicated in Section 3 of this report (Study Design) we regarded the participant and comparison group as comparable.

Exhibit 9:
Cyclebreak I — Percentage of Individuals Receiving Income Assistance Over Time After the Project



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The data obtained provided a comparison between the percentage of participants and their comparison group receiving income assistance payments for each month since starting the project. Information for Cyclebreak I participants was available for up to 24 months after starting the project. For Cyclebreak II participants data was provided for 14 months after starting the project. Exhibits 9 and 10 outline the results of the analysis for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II participants, respectively. Including the job search component, each training session was assumed to be three months in duration. For this reason, each exhibit presents the percentage of participants and comparison group members receiving income assistance payments. Data is presented up to the 19th month since the start date of Cyclebreak I and up to 11 months for Cyclebreak II. These points were selected as arbitrary cut off points since the remaining data was available for less than half the participants. The two graphs show a pattern of reduced dependency on social assistance over time for both participants and non-participants.

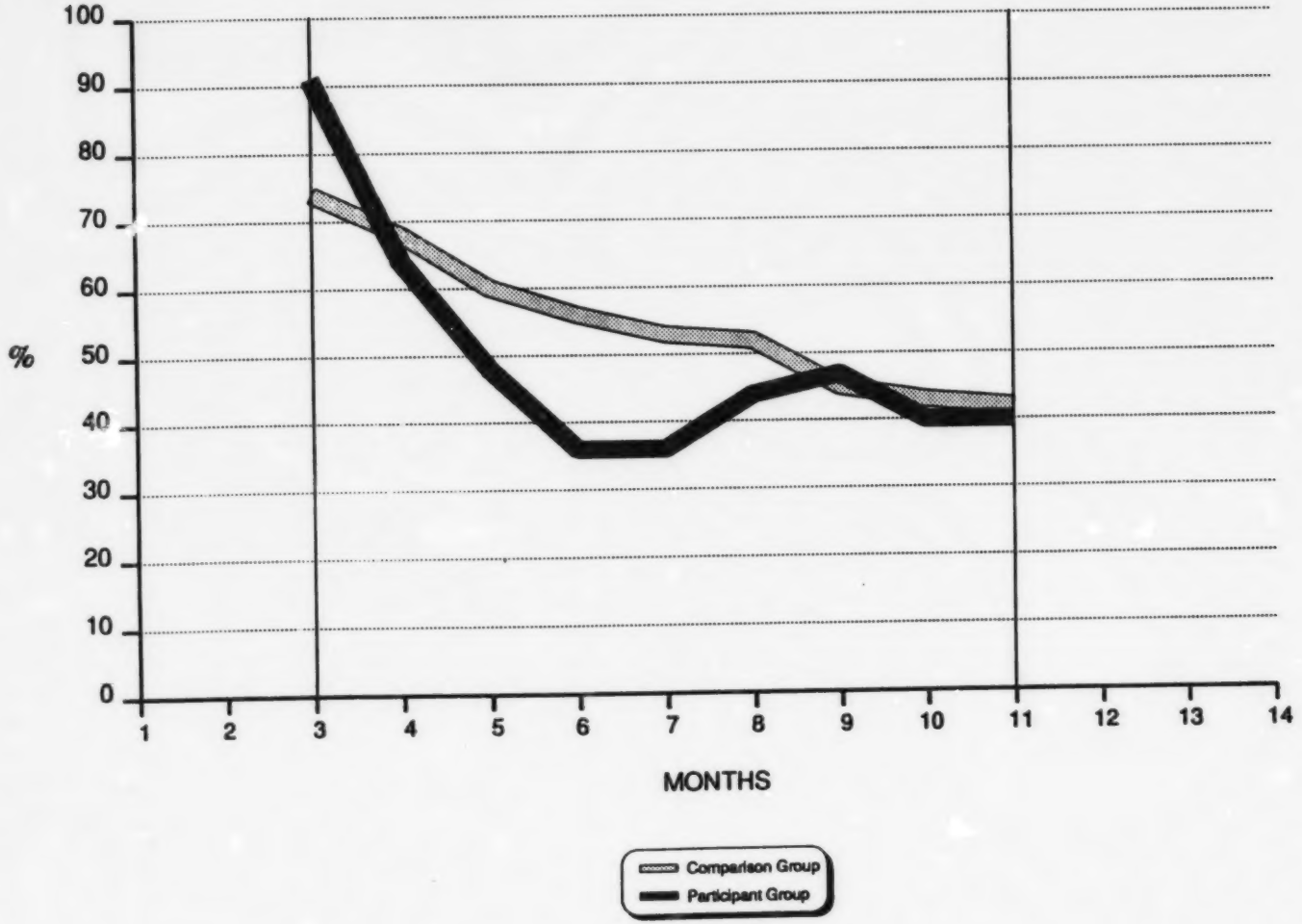
Although at some points, particularly for Cyclebreak II, fewer participants are receiving income assistance than the comparison group the overall pattern shows that reduced dependency occurs over time for both groups at approximately the same rate. This leads us to conclude that the observed reduction in dependency occurs naturally, with the passage of time **whether or not the recipient participated in an employability enhancement project or not.**

This result raises questions about the cost-effectiveness of this project in particular, and employability enhancement projects in general if the primary objective is reducing dependence on income assistance. This does not mean that Cyclebreak was not effective in achieving other objectives nor does it mean that the project did not have an overall positive impact on participants.

There is some evidence however, that certain types of projects are more successful than others in helping participants become independent of income assistance. A 1985 study conducted by the Research, Evaluation and Statistics Branch of the MSS&H's Corporate Services Division highlights the types of projects that are effective at breaking the cycle of dependence (*Employment Initiatives for Income Assistance Recipients*). In an evaluation of projects that were Provincial initiatives, a four year tracking study found that projects focusing on classroom training were not effective in helping clients become independent of income assistance. The study did find that on-the-job training strategies (e.g. full wage subsidy government projects, partial wage subsidy in private sector) helped to decrease dependence on income assistance when compared to a comparison group.

The results of ERN evaluations tend to confirm the Ministry's conclusions and as such provide a focus for the design and

Exhibit 10:
Cyclebreak II — Percentage of Individuals Receiving Income Assistance Over Time After the Project



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funding of employability enhancement projects. Projects such as Cyclebreak which incorporate both classroom and on-the-job training components may wish to consider expending a greater proportion of their resources on this second element.

This analysis points to the need to include in evaluations, whenever possible, comparison group data to arrive at conclusions regarding the project's impact and effectiveness. Unfortunately, for various reasons, this data is often not readily available from the provincial ministries or other agencies involved. However, we regard it as an essential component for the following two reasons:

- to assess the cost-effectiveness of funding employability enhancement projects, especially during the current era of government fiscal restraint; and

- underlying the effectiveness of employability enhancement projects and bottom line costs is whether or not these projects meet the needs and expectations of their participants.

ISSUE 4

Did the Cyclebreak Project improve the participant's financial situation?

Conclusion

The project was somewhat successful in raising the level of income of participants. For about half the participants the project contributed to a marginal increase in income, from before the project, of about $727 per year ($61/month). This increase can be attributed to the more attractive higher paying jobs some participants received as a result of the project.

However, a greater number (33) of participants tended to feel financially better off after the project. Possible explanations for this include:

- participants' positive perceptions of the project;

- participants positive feelings about reducing their reliance on income assistance; and

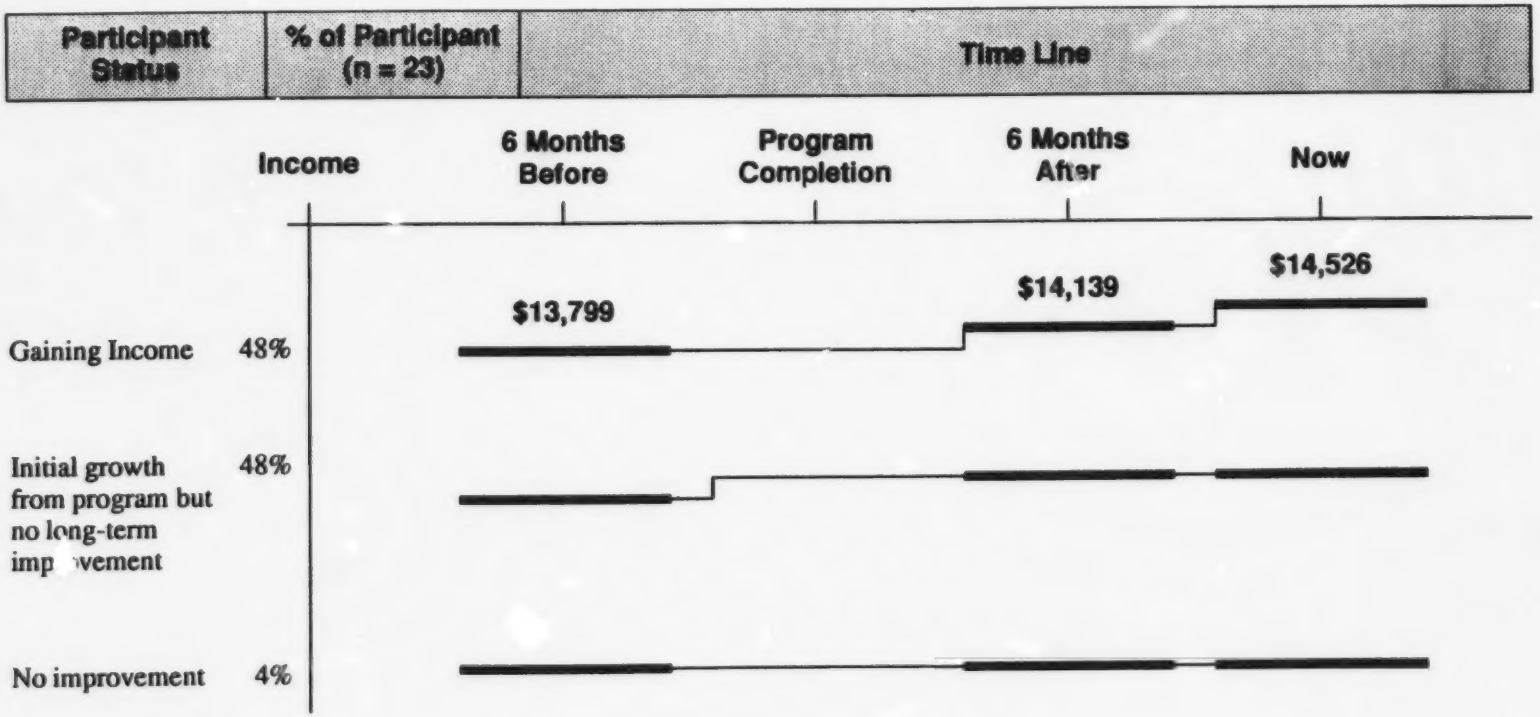
- most participants were living with someone who may have provided additional financial support not reported on in the participant survey.

We concluded that the hourly wage of participants following project participation provided a positive financial inducement for single persons to stay off income assistance. This financial inducement was not evident with single mothers, given the amount of income assistance they received.

Issue Focus

This issue addresses another important question and attempts to measure whether real improvements in income have results from the project. Indirectly, we also wanted to address the question of quality of life and to assess whether

Exhibit 11:
Cyclebreak II — Changes in the Financial Situation of Cyclebreak Participants



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employment may result in disincentives for clients.

Findings

Do participants report any change in income?

Using survey data, we examined the income levels of project participants for three points in time:

* six months before the project;
* six months after the project (where applicable); and
* at the time of the survey.

Exhibit 11 on the opposite page, depicts the income levels reported for these three points in time. Income levels are presented for all participants who reported a long-term gain in annual income. However, their figures were not adjusted to reflect inflation and this should be taken into consideration when examining the figures presented.

In order to compute the current annual income of survey respondents we used the hourly wage they reported. Since we did not have the exact number of hours worked each week for all participants, we made the assumption that part-time employment consisted of at least 20 hours a week and full-time employment involved forty hours of work each week. These assumptions were used to compute an annual income.

It can be argued that at least for part-time employees we are underestimating annual income. However, we found it more advisable to make conservative rather than liberal estimates of income. Caution is merited when examining this data to the extent that it relies on self-reported data which is subject to errors in recall.

An examination of the time line reveals that 48% of participants experienced a marginal long term gain in annual income. Data was available for 23 of the 37 respondents to undertake this comparison. Before the project the mean annual income was $13,799 and rose slightly to $14,139 in the six months after the project. At the time of the survey, the mean annual income was $14,526 which represents a gain of $727 ($61/month). This can be explained by the more attractive and, therefore, higher paying jobs some participants received as a result of the project.

The remaining participants (52%) saw no long-term improvement in their income.

Thirty-three participants felt they were better off financially at the time of the survey than in the six months immediately before the project. Sixty-eight (25) percent of respondents reported that they felt they were better off financially at the time of the survey compared to the period after the project. This suggests that a significantly greater percentage of individuals perceived improvements in their financial well-being.

The greater percentage of individuals who felt financially better off compared to those who reported a long term increase in income may be explained by the following factors:

- the positive feelings participants may have gained from their reduced reliance on income assistance;

- the positive perceptions participants have of the project in improving their self-confidence, skills and ability to deal with barriers to employability; and

- the fact that most respondents were living with someone at the time of the survey (e.g. parent, spouse, roommate) which leads us to question whether overall perceptions were made on the basis of their current living arrangements, rather than simply on personal income levels.

In our analysis we also examined the income levels of participants who worked, and did not work, after the project. Income levels for the 33 participants who were employed at some time after the project were: $14,098 before, $14,409 immediately before the project and $14,319 at the time of the Survey. Thirty-two (97%) of these respondents reported that they felt they were better off financially at the time of the survey than before the project.

We also determine that nineteen (58%) of the group of 33 respondents who worked relied on their wages as their primary source of income, with 11 (33%) relying on either social assistance (6) or unemployment insurance (5) as their primary source of income.

Interviews with MSS&H personnel revealed that single employable income assistance recipients (the majority of Cyclebreak participants) receive $468 per month to cover rent and living expenses. This corresponds to a wage of approximately $2.90 per hour. Recognizing that the minimum wage in British Columbia is $4.75 per hour it is understandable that the primary motivation voiced by participants for getting off income assistance was to raise their income level.

The file review revealed that the majority of jobs obtained by participants for which wages were reported (n=21), the wages ranged from $5.00/hr to $8.50/hr. The average wage was $7.28. This corresponds closely with the average hourly wage survey respondents indicated they received at their first job after Cyclebreak.

Unless an individual was able to gain the difference between $2.90/hr and these wages, through casual/underground employment, the financial incentive will remain an important influence in the decision of participants to seek employment or receive employability training. This may explain the gradual reduction in income assistance dependence experienced by project participants and comparison group members following their participation in Cyclebreak.

For the few sole support parents that participated in the project the financial incentive to seek employment is weak. It is estimated by MSS&H that the amount of income assistance received by a parent with one child corresponds to a wage of about $6.75/hr. This is about $1.00 less than the average wage Cyclebreak participants received at jobs. Given this minimal difference and the general inconvenience associated with leaving a child in daycare, arranging transportation, and making other arrangements, it is unlikely that the wage participants would receive from participation in the Cyclebreak project would provide suitable compensation.

ISSUE 5

What were the costs of the project compared to social assistance?

Conclusion

The average monthly income assistance savings were $210.34 per month.

A rough comparison of Cyclebreak with other projects suggests that Cyclebreak is not very cost-effective. Approximately 2 1/4 years and 2 years of income assistance savings offset Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II budget costs respectively. MSS&H social assistance data corroborates this conclusion.

Issue Focus

This issue is of central importance to project funders and administrators but is frequently overlooked during the planning process. In time of fiscal restraint it is those projects that can show a positive cost-benefit ratio that will have a competitive edge in applying for funding.

What is the cost of social assistance for each participant?

To address this issue we determined the average net saving in income assistance payments by taking the difference in the mean amounts of monthly income assistance payments survey respondents reported they received, before and after Cyclebreak. The average monthly income assistance savings were $210.34 per month per questionnaire respondent, or $2,524.08 per year per respondent.

Based on the figures from the evaluation assessment and questionnaire data, we determined that for a population of 42 participants in Cyclebreak I, the total net savings in income assistance was $106,011.36. This is an estimate of the net yearly savings in income assistance for Cyclebreak I and rests upon the assumption that the survey respondents adequately reflect the characteristics of the project's participant population: an assumption which is weakened by the fact that the sample was not randomly selected.

In the same fashion we determined that for a population of 59 participants in Cyclebreak II, the total net yearly savings during the Cyclebreak II budgetary period (1.5 years), were $223,381.08.

This estimate rests on the same assumptions described above.

Taking the cost savings identified above and comparing them with the Cyclebreak budget, we determined that approximately 2 1/4 years of income assistance savings would offset the Cyclebreak I budget, and slightly more than 2 years of savings would offset the Cyclebreak II budget. A rough comparison of these results with other projects ERN has evaluated suggests that Cyclebreak is not very cost effective.

Cost savings data was also available from MSS&H and point to a similar conclusion on cost effectiveness. Detailed cost calculations are outlined in Volume II Technical Appendices.

The average monthly reduction in the percentage of Cyclebreak I participants receiving income assistance benefits was -1.25%, which represents no savings in income assistance payments. The average monthly reduction in the percentage of Cyclebreak II participants receiving income assistance benefits was 8%, or an annual savings in income assistance payments of $25,190.40.

ISSUE 6

What program interventions contributed most to increasing employability?

Conclusion

The in-class portion of the project contributed significantly to enhancing participants' job search skills, building self-confidence and motivation, and providing participants with a better understanding of how to handle work situations. This was due to the quality of instruction, but also the helpful, supportive atmosphere the project staff created.

To achieve more lasting effects in enhancing employability the lessons learned in the in-class portion of the project must be reinforced through job placements and follow-up counselling.

The four week job placement component had a high rate of completion (88%). However, only a relatively small percentage (49%) of participants obtained a paid job from the placement presumably because they were unable to meet employers' expectations. To further improve the delivery of job placements greater effort should be expended by project staff in supporting the efforts of placement hosts and in monitoring the progress of participants.

The overall job search services provided by the project were regarded as useful and important by project participants because of the job contacts that were made on their behalf and the practical experience that was obtained in job searching. In class job search training was seen as less useful by participants.

Follow-up counselling was one of the more effective components of the project, because of the considerable efforts made by staff in contacting participants. A high percentage of

participants regarded it as helpful to finding and keeping a job.

"Business mentors" was not a successful feature of the project.

The considerable time and resources spent by the project on Physical Activities is not justified by the benefits it provides. This component should be reduced in size and importance, but not eliminated entirely.

Issue Focus

This issue is of vital importance, not only for Cyclebreak Project management, but for other individuals planning similar projects and for agencies providing funding. It is essential to identify interventions which are the most effective to ensure a maximum utilization of human and monetary resources. This type of information is necessary if projects will continue to improve and meet the needs of their clients and underscores the need to collect this information on a continuous basis.

In assessing the effectiveness of the Cyclebreak interventions we focused, in part, on their demonstrated "value" in enhancing the job finding and job keeping skills of project participants.

Findings

In the questionnaire we divided the project into four main components and asked participants to rank them according to how helpful they were in making them more employable. The following ranking occurred: in-class instruction (50%); job search (27%); job placement (18%) and; long-term follow-up counselling (6%).

In the focus group with past participants, individuals were asked to identify those key components of the project they regarded as important to assisting them in finding a job. These components were then listed and ranked by participants in the following order:

- in-class instruction (remarks were made that it helped in the development of confidence);
- placement (permitted the development of job related skills and work experience);
- counselling (provided to participants whenever requested); and
- panel discussions.

This ranking is similar to the one achieved from the questionnaire except for the job search component which was not included in the focus group ranking.

Focus group participants did not feel it was possible to set priorities among the project components in their enhancement of job keeping skills. This was because the barriers perceived by individuals in job keeping varied from individual to individual.

What is the value of the in-class training component of the project?

In this section of the report we deal only with the training provided in the classroom setting. During the four weeks that in-class training is conducted, various activities outside the classroom (e.g. physical activities) are carried out. The effectiveness of these components is discussed later on in this issue.

As indicated above in-class training was ranked the highest by the largest percentage of participants surveyed. This results coincides with the emphasis placed on this component by project staff. Aside from imparting skills and improving self confidence, the staff also regarded in-class instruction as crucial to the development of a "bond" and a long-term counselling relationship with participants.

Comments from survey respondents focused on the following benefits provided by the in-class training:

- helped with job search skills;
- built self-confidence and motivation;
- provided participants with a better understanding of how to handle situations at work;
- provided a helpful, supportive environment.

Another indicator of the effectiveness of the in-class component of the project is the level of participants' attendance. A review of files indicated that 76% of participants (45 out of 59) maintained a fairly regular attendance with absences totalling usually less than 5 days out of 20; 17% had poor attendance, but managed to complete the project; and 7% dropped out.

We regard this as a positive result for three reasons. First, the Cyclebreak target group suffers from a short attention span because of its average age and barriers to employability. Second, over a four week period it is difficult to maintaining the interest level of participants. Interviews with Rehabilitation officers and focus groups indicated that the role of the teachers is crucial to maintain individuals' continued project involved. Participants in focus groups were almost universal in their appreciation of the friendliness / approachability of project staff. Third, drop outs tended to occur very early in the project. The limited number (7% or 4 out of 59) reveals that the efforts of project officials to "latch onto" and motivate participants (who arrive at the project feeling suspicious) to attend the crucial first few days were successful.

We noticed no differences in attendance between Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II participants. This finding does not coincide with the comments of project staff that Cyclebreak II participants tended to be less job ready and, therefore, more likely to drop out or have poor attendance than Cyclebreak I participants.

Focus group discussions tended to confirm the results of the questionnaire regarding the benefits provided by in-class instruction. This portion of the project conferred benefits on participants in the following areas:

- self-confidence;
- motivation;
- interview skills;
- social skills;
- hygiene/nutrition; and
- resume writing.

The focus group of participants that had just completed the four weeks in-class instruction identified the following list of in-class instruction "modules" as the most important in enhancing their ability to find and keep a job:

- preparation of resumes;
- communications;
- problem solving workshop;
- phoning for placements;
- skills assessment;
- responding to change;
- goal setting; and
- negotiation.

Our general assessment is that the in-class portion of the project was very effective in:

- providing a supportive environment for participants which they would feel free to access in the future;
- building self-confidence and motivation; and
- providing useful information on conducting a job search.

This effectiveness can be attributed to the commitment of project staff in providing quality instruction appropriate to the needs of participants.

While in-class instruction is a vital component of employability enhancement projects, it must be complimented by practical on-the-job experience and follow-up counselling so that the lessons learned can be put into practice and result in long-standing improvements in employability. With this in mind we turn to a discussion of the job placement portion of the Cyclebreak Project.

What is the value of the job placement component?

Ninety-two percent (34) of participants held a placement following the in-class portion of the project. The remaining 8% (3) did not receive a placement either because they dropped out or were not able to find a placement host that would accept them.

The majority of participants held one placement. Twenty-five (68%) participants had one placement, 8 (22%) held two placements and one respondent (3%) reported having three placements.

Ninety-two percentage 34 survey respondents who had a job placement, 29 (88%) completed the placement. Interestingly, the file review indicated that a significantly smaller number of participants (62%) completed the four week placement. The files also indicated that a much higher percentage of participants from Cyclebreak I (78%) compared to Cyclebreak II (51%) completed the four weeks placement. Generally, the project was successful in ensuring that participants completed the placement.

Forty-nine percent (16) of the survey respondents reported that their placement resulted in a paid job. The file review revealed that 27% and 32% of Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II participants, respectively, got a job from their placement.

Reasons cited by the 17 survey respondents whose placements did not lead to a job included: not liking the job (5, 29%); a lack of skills or education (3, 18%); no available work (2, 12%); and other (2,12%).

The fact that a relatively low percentage of participants obtained employment from their placement suggests that the project was less successful than might be desired in assisting participants to meet the employment expectations of placement hosts. In some cases this may be explained by the better quality of job obtained for participants by project staff that required skill levels beyond the capability of participants.

In the results outlined above we noted differences between data from the survey and file review. On possible reason is that participants who were located for the survey were less likely to be mobile and more likely to be employed. Interviews indicated that individuals who were less successful participants in the project tended to be highly mobile and difficult to contact.

Forty-one percent of the participants who found a job as a result of the placement indicated that the job was held under the Employment Plus Project.

The results outlined above suggest that the placement was a positive contributing factor to enhancing participants level of employability. However, possibilities exist for improving the delivery of this portion of the project given the data present above and the following additional facts:

- the survey indicated that sixty-four percent of the respondents perceived the job placement component as helpful to them in finding and keeping a job;

- the job placement was ranked third in importance behind the in-class and job search portions of the project; and

- a relatively small percentage of participants obtained employment from their placement.

Improvements could be made in the following areas:

- the survey of placement host indicated that Cyclebreak staff were on average in touch with the placement hosts three times during the placement (n=7). Greater effort might be expended to increase the depth and frequency of this contact.

- the staff also, whenever necessary, took the opportunity to talk to participants when they came to the office to pick up their accumulated allowance money. This contact should be increased and possibly made a condition of receiving the allowance money.

The survey of placement hosts revealed the following observations, which tend to support the conclusions drawn above:

- most employers (5/6) accepted a placement with the idea that they might in the future hire the individual at a wage;

- employers provided placements to give income assistance recipients an opportunity to better themselves but also to incorporate a needed "extra hand" in their operations;

- employers felt the ability of placements to work with co-workers improved significantly as a result of the placement;

- there was less consensus among employers surveyed whether the ability of participants to arrive promptly for work and have the skills to do the job, improved as a result of the placement;

- most employers (4/7) did not feel that participants' confidence/self-esteem; the ability to handle an interview; and work experience improved as a result of the placement;

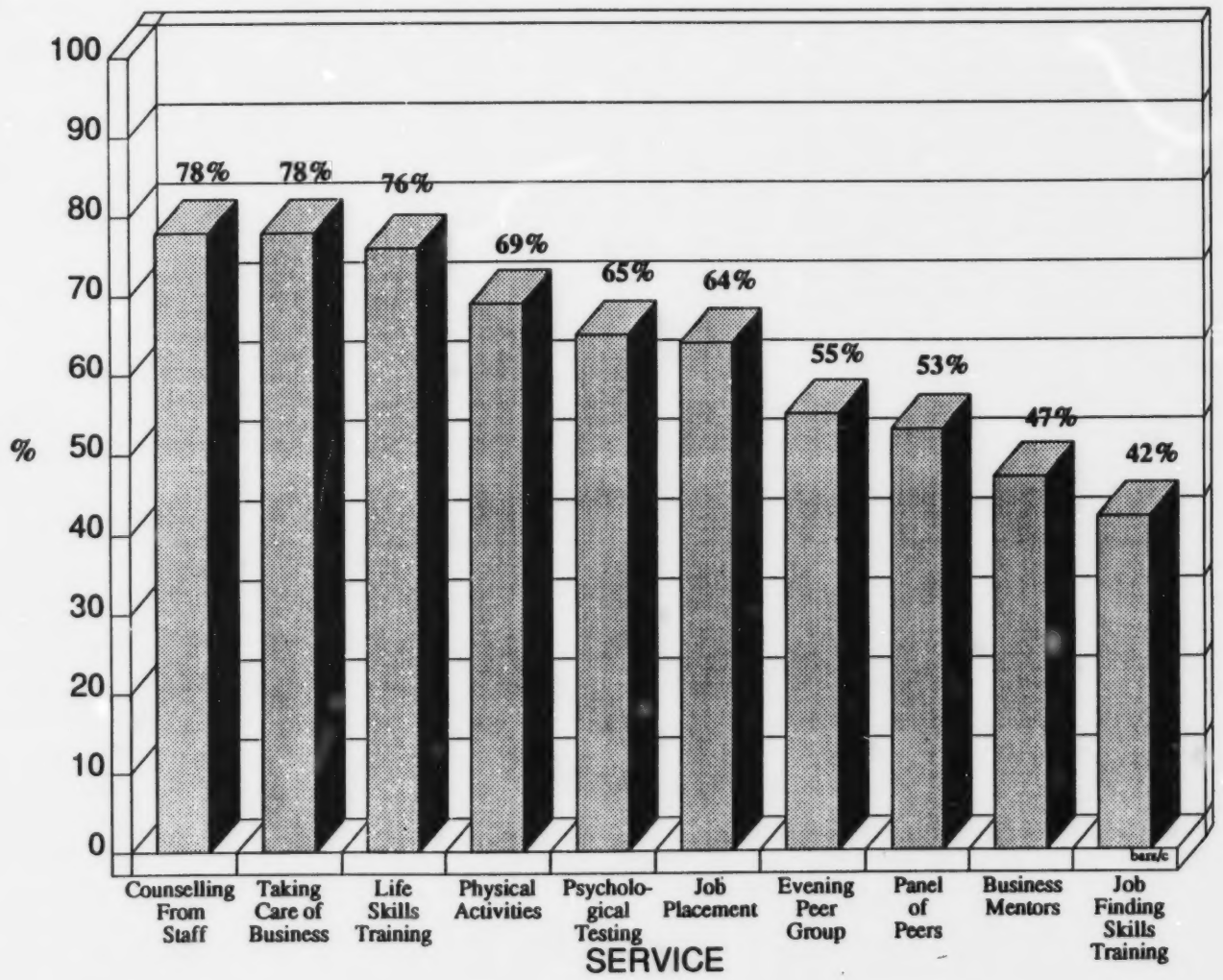
- employers considered arriving promptly for work; the ability to work with co-workers; and, to a lesser extent, having the skills to do the job, as very important to meeting the entry requirements of jobs in their companies;

- five out of seven employers believed participants required more training and supervision than other workers; and

- 6/8 employers considered the project's four week period for placements as an acceptable amount of time to assess whether an individual was suitable for hire.

We now turn to a discussion of the job search portion of the Cyclebreak Project.

Exhibit 12: Cyclebreak Project — Services Perceived as Helpful in Finding and Keeping a Job



What was the value of the job search component of the Project?

The following information was obtained from file reviews and the questionnaire:

- almost two-thirds (62%) of the telephone survey respondents indicated that they took advantage of the project's job search services.

- among the four main sections of the project the "job search" part of Cyclebreak was ranked the second highest in its helpfulness to assisting participants in becoming more employable;

- however, we found from our file review that only a small number of individuals who started the project benefitted from the 4 week job search training at the end of Cyclebreak I (39%) or individual job search counselling provided during Cyclebreak II (19%)

- in focus groups the job search component of the project was not singled out by participants as important in developing job finding skills.

- among the 10 project components listed in Exhibit 12 job finding skills training was regarded by the smallest percentage of participants (42%) as helpful in finding and keeping a job;

The apparent conflicting nature of these results can be explained by the distinction between the job finding skills training and the job search assistance provided by project staff.

In the questionnaire the term "job search" may have been perceived differently by respondents as applying to a range of project features including:

- the assistance project staff provided in actively searching on behalf of participants for a suitable placement. Participants seemed to regard this as an important opportunity for them to obtain a better job than they had before.

- the in-class teaching on job finding skills; and

- the practical job search training (4 weeks or individual counselling) provided to participants after the placement was completed.

On this basis, our general conclusion is that the in-class job finding skills training was not regarded a helpful by project participants. However, the overall job search assistance provided to participants was considered important and useful, particularly in providing job leads and practical experience in job searching.

With what frequency did participants use the long-term support element of the Cyclebreak Project?

Cyclebreak staff regarded this component as a very important part of the project.

We found that 34 (92%) survey respondents indicated that they were in contact with Cyclebreak staff after the job placement and job search components. Of these, 28 (85%) were in touch with staff three or more times. Respondents indicated that Cyclebreak staff initiated this contact in 65% (20) of the cases, that they contacted staff in 6% (2) of the contacts, and that contact was initiated by both 35% (12) of the time. The most frequently cited reason (19, 79%) for this contact was for staff to check on the progress of past participants.

Notwithstanding this contact, project staff in interviews indicated that there is sometimes a fine balance to be struck between the need to keep a past participant interested in keeping in touch with the project, and not been seen as too prying or interventionist about the progress of their life since they left the project.

In addition to the above, we discovered that, compared to other project components, counselling from staff was regarded by one of the highest percentage of participants (78%) as helpful to finding and keeping a job.

These results suggest that long-term follow-up was an effective contributor to the enhancement of participants' employability.

Cyclebreak staff recognized that their data collection methods did not determine the frequency and extent of long-term contact maintained between the staff and participants. They saw this as an area for potential improvement in project delivery.

What was the value of the Business Mentors component of the project?

During the planning of Cyclebreak the concept of "Mentoring" was intended to be central to project delivery. The initial concept of mentors was that they would be whole corporations providing volunteer assistance to Cyclebreak participants. However, inquiries by Cyclebreak officials revealed that voluntarism among corporations in the area of employability enhancement was not sufficiently developed in Vancouver.

Consequently, individuals from the corporate world were recruited as mentors, with the idea that they would act somewhat like big brothers/sisters to Cyclebreak participants.

It is evident from the questionnaire data, focus groups and interviews with Cyclebreak staff that mentors were not a successful aspect of the Cyclebreak project for the following reasons:

- business mentors were viewed as helpful by one of the smallest percentages (47%) of survey respondents;

- focus groups participants perceived few benefits from the mentors aspect of the project;

- a wide gap existed in the life experiences of mentors and participants;

- most mentors did not have the time to devote sufficient attention to the participants. This meant that the intended bond of trust was rarely developed between participants and mentors.

- Cyclebreak staff estimated that 10-15% of mentors were successful; and

- Cyclebreak staff who had the most frequent contact with participants were more likely to develop bonds with participants.

Cyclebreak staff are currently considering ways of integrating in the Project curriculum successful former participants, beyond their participation in a panel discussion during the in-class session.

What was the value of other components of the Project?

One of the key distinguishing features of the Cyclebreak project was Physical Activities. Physical activities is the single most time consuming component of the in-class portion of the Cyclebreak project. For Cyclebreak II it covered about 28% of the total four week time period (11 out of 40 half-days) and involved activities such as excursions to the theatre, hiking, visits to sports facilities.

Cyclebreak staff indicated that the activities allowed for some role reversal between participants and staff, and that the activities facilitated the development of a lasting bond. It was felt that this bond would allow for successful counselling, but also the possibility of continued contact over the long-term with participants.

Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents regarded Physical activities as helpful in finding and keeping a job.

Focus group participants reported that physical activities provided group support (also provided in-class), exercise and social skills (also provided in-class). The key observation made by all focus group participants about physical activities was that it provided a "break" from classroom activities.

Past participants in focus groups did not regard physical activities as relevant to improving job finding skills.

Generally, our research indicates that the physical activities component is not a significant contributor to employability enhancement which justifies the considerable time and money expended. Recognizing its usefulness in providing a break from the classroom routine and assisting in forming bonds between participants and project staff, we conclude that time and resources allocated to this activity should be reduced considerably but not eliminated.

ISSUE 7

How did the "for profit" objective of the delivery agency influence the effectiveness of the Project?

Conclusion

The "return on investment" (ie. income assistance savings) was 2 1/4 and 2 years, respectively, for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II. For this reason, the project appears to be less successful in providing an acceptable return to government funding.

The "for-profit" nature of the delivery agency appears to positively affect project effectiveness because it is quicker to change project delivery to better meet the needs of participants and funders. The for-profit agency is also very responsive to changing financial circumstances.

Unlike not-for-profit agencies, the owners of a for profit agency are required to monitor and deal with concerns about the sharing of the "revenue pie". These concerns have not affected Cyclebreak project delivery. With these concerns in mind Tully and Company is intent on developing among its staff a sense of ownership and commitment towards the business, "profit oriented" nature of the company.

Issue Focus

The Cyclebreak project has an additional interesting feature: it is delivered by a "for profit" agency. British Columbia and Alberta are among the first provinces to contract out to agencies like Tully and Company the delivery of training projects.

From the perspective of policy makers it is important to determine the relative merits or not of contracting "for profit" organizations. This assessment must go beyond the overall concern whether it is appropriate to have a private agency make a profit delivering services to the poor. The two criteria which are appropriate in assessing the pros and cons of this issue are:

- **whether the project is cost effective (i.e. delivery costs compare favourably with the benefits achieved).** From the perspective of ERN, the benefits occur in the reduction of social assistance disbursements by governments.

  A "for profit" agency should provide a "return" on the investment comparable to other delivery agencies. It may be true that the achievement of profits will attract more talented and creative people into the social services field, and that this provides partial justification for policy makers to allow higher costs for projects like Cyclebreak.

  However, it is also true that the "raison d'etre" of private sector project delivery is that this will be achieved with greater efficiency: the profit motive acting as a powerful incentive in this area.

- **whether the profit motive of the agency affects either positively or negatively the effectiveness of the project delivery.** This assessment is based more on qualitative information obtained through interviews.

Our analysis of this issue is based on an assessment of these three criteria.

Findings

Tully and Company Ltd. and its parent corporation Bernard C. Vinge & Associates Ltd. were formed based on a number of key perceptions:

- not for profit organizations with their boards of directors tended to have little operational flexibility in, for example, hiring and firing personnel or pursuing new initiatives. A limited company gives the operator the flexibility to develop new ideas and change project delivery to meet the changing needs of its clientele;

- risk is higher in a "for profit" organization which justifies the nature of the profit obtained by its operators; and

- a for profit organization is accountable solely to its clientele, and because accountability is not diffused in other directions, it is more responsive to the needs of the clientele.

Regarding the first criteria for assessing the "for profit" nature of the project we determined in Issue 5 that the budgets for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II were recovered in 2 1/4 years and 2 years, respectively. Based on a rough comparison with the results of ERN evaluations of other employability enhancement projects, the Cyclebreak project appears to be less successful in providing an acceptable return on the investment of government funders. The data available to us did not provide for a useful cost comparison between Cyclebreak and another employability enhancement agency in the Vancouver area.

In researching the second criteria for assessing a "for profit" agency we first noticed that the operating company, Tully and Company, showed considerable concern with making continued improvements and alterations to the design, within the basic parameters established by the original funders. For this reason Cyclebreak has evolved since its inception.

Risk remains an important incentive for the owners of the operating company for Cyclebreak, although incorporation as a company removes the focus of the risk on the individual. When Bernard C. Vinge & Associates Ltd. was just beginning its operations, the risk was extremely high because personal guarantees for delivery of service were required.

We found some evidence to indicate that the concept of accountability to clientele

made the operating company of Cyclebreak more responsive than a not-for-profit agency. As with any employability enhancement agency, the operating company for Cyclebreak has been very quick to respond to negative criticism, particularly from funders. The agency's greater responsiveness lies primarily in its ability to make quick changes to project structure or the manner in which the operating agency functions.

We noticed that a for-profit agency is far more responsive to changing financial/operational circumstances. Where a not-for-profit agency might be willing to absorb for a longer period of time extra personnel costs during lean times (in part because of more complex hiring and firing policies), a for-profit agency is likely to act more quickly to control costs.

In addition, we found that a "for profit" agency experiences unique personnel management concerns compared to a not-for-profit agency. Primarily, this revolves around what share of the revenue "pie" staff believed they were or were not receiving. Particularly, during lean times staff are less likely to be confident that they are bearing a proportionate share of decreased revenues.

In this regard, our interviews indicated that Tully and Company is intent on developing among its staff a sense of ownership and commitment towards the business, "profit oriented" nature of the company. This includes:

- interesting staff in profit sharing;
- providing more information to staff on the finances of the company so that they can contribute to decision making; and
- interesting staff members in taking an active role in marketing. This would require re-orienting their perspectives away from "operational values" unrelated to the conduct of a business, developed from years of work in government educational and social assistance agencies.

It was not our assessment that the concerns outlined above have negatively impacted on the current effectiveness of the project. Cyclebreak staff stressed their commitment to effective teaching. However, for managers of profit oriented operating companies, these concerns are in need of ongoing attention.

Generally, the profit motive of an operating company like Tully and Company creates a powerful incentive to market its services and present itself in a positive light.

In our analysis of Cyclebreak we noticed an additional distinguishing characteristic of for-profit delivery. The office environment was more formal and business-like than the "not-for profit" organization we investigated. The not-for-profit organization was furnished in a rudimentary fashion and the accommodation was less expensive. This business-like atmosphere in the for-profit

company, which included formal attire for staff caused participants to treat project staff with considerable respect. This benefitted the effectiveness of the project in imparting skills to its participants. It was not possible in the research conducted for this study to determine whether the substantial rental costs for Cyclebreak accommodation were justified on the basis of additional benefits to the project.

OTHER FINDINGS

The size of MSS&H Rehabilitation officer case loads does not permit officers to take a detailed interest in how the components of a specific project can best match the specific needs of each case they are responsible for, nor does it allow officers to make an educated selection between the large number of projects available for youth in the Vancouver area. Referrals tend to be based more on the working relationship that is developed between the Rehabilitation officers and employability project workers. **As a result, for projects in the Vancouver area marketing efforts directed at MSS&H, other referral agencies and the community, at large, are important to ensuring that a steady stream of individuals apply for entry to the Cyclebreak project.**

It was recognized by Cyclebreak officials that marketing efforts are needed to:

- expand the visibility of Cyclebreak so that it might be applied in other jurisdictions; and
- increase its visibility among Rehabilitation officers in Vancouver so that more referrals could be provided to the project.

Other findings we have made include the following:

- The number of personnel staffing the project has decreased from four to three, and includes the President of Tully and Company (part-time), the project supervisor (full-time) and a counsellor (full-time);
- Increasing the training allowance from $8.00/day in Cyclebreak I to $10.00/day in Cyclebreak II does not appear to have enhanced the incentive it is designed to provide in keeping an individual at a job placement. Interviews with staff indicated that the training allowance provided "pocket-money" for participants.
- The file review revealed that a higher percentage of participants in the project completed the in-class instruction (91% in Cyclebreak I) than the job placement (78% in Cyclebreak I). This suggests that factors other than the incentive from the training allowance, provided in both project components, played a larger role.
- Interviews and file reviews indicated that the role of psychological assessments played a negligible role in the project. For example, many files

from Cyclebreak II did not include psychological assessment forms.

- We found that there were competing pressures faced by Cyclebreak and its operating agency regarding project delivery perspectives. These are focused on:

  The participants - they receive the benefits of Cyclebreak training and they report back to rehabilitation officers about their experiences.

  Cyclebreak staff perceived a "human services" focus to their project because what they considered as most important for participants' future well being is the achievement of long-term lifestyle and behaviour/attitude changes in participants. Only through these changes, it is argued, can a long-term integration of an individual into the job market be possible. This might involve wide ranging outcomes such as the following:

  - greater level of independence from income assistance;
  - moving to further training (e.g. GED upgrading);
  - increasing employability; and
  - a return to a family environment, if appropriate.

  Success from a "participant" perspective is related to the achievement of these outcomes.

  The funders - These have included Employment and Immigration Canada and MSS&H. The current funder, MSS&H, expects to see some positive results (value for money) from the project in reducing the dependence of participants on income assistance. This reduced dependence relies on a corresponding increase in the level of employment. Participants pursuing further academic training outside of employability projects (e.g. YES Canada) is not an activity encouraged by the Ministry since income assistance recipients must finance it on their own. Overall, the Ministry maintains an "employment focus" to employability enhancement.

  From a business vantage point Tully and Company must pay due regard to the "employment focus" desired by MSS&H. However, from a project implementation vantage point Cyclebreak administrators must concern themselves with the "human services" focus they feel is appropriate for participants. Some resolution of the competing requirements of these perspectives needs to be achieved so that a clearer understanding and/or confirmation of the project objectives can be attained.

- As a final point we noted that the project has not been required to report against pre-established performance targets. Because changing external factors constantly affect project outputs, it may not be possible to establish specific targets. However, it would be feasible to

identify key indicators of project performance.

5.
CONCLUSION

The contribution of the project was not in educating participants in obtaining employment. Participants already showed an ability to find general employment. (see p.16)

However, the project significantly assisted participants in:

- maintaining employment
- finding more attractive, better employment.

Cyclebreak enhanced the ability of participants to deal will all barriers to finding employment. Similar enhancements were evident in the ability to deal with the following key barriers to keeping a job: amount of pay, confidence, personal problems and handling job responsibilities. (see pp.19-20)

The project did not play a primary role in assisting participants in making the career decision to pursue further education. (see p.23)

Slightly more than half of Cyclebreak participants, for the six month period after the project, appeared to break their dependence on income assistance.

Comparison group data used in the evaluation study raised concerns about the impact of the Cyclebreak project and employability projects in reducing dependency on income assistance. The comparison group showed the same pattern of reduced dependency as the project participants. The body of knowledge on employability enhancement suggests that the job placement is crucial to achieving a demonstrable project effect in this area. (see p.24)

The project was somewhat successful in raising the level of income of participants. For about half the participants the project contributed to a marginal increase in income over the long-term.

However, a greater number of participants tended to feel financially better off. Reasons to explain this relate, in part to participants' positive feelings about the program and their reduced dependency on income assistance.

We concluded that the hourly wage participants following project participation provided a positive financial inducement for single persons to stay off income assistance. This financial inducement was not evident with single

mothers, given the amount of income assistance they receive. (see p.27)

A rough comparison of Cyclebreak with other projects suggest that Cyclebreak is not very cost-effective. Using questionnaire data, approximately 2 1/4 years and 2 years of income assistance savings offset Cyclebreak I and II budget costs, respectively. MSS&H income assistance data corroborates this conclusion. (see p.30)

The in-class portion of the project and long term following-up counselling were the components providing the most significant contribution to enhancing participants' employability. Although the job placement component was completed by most participants it was less successful in assisting participants in moving from the placement directly into a paid job. The job search component was useful to participants in the contacts made on their behalf to employers and the practical experience provided in job searching. In-class job search training was seen as less useful. Follow-up counselling was one of the more effective components of the project, because of the considerable efforts made by staff in contacting participants. (see pp.35-38)

"Business Mentors" was not a successful feature of the project. The benefits provided by Physical Activities are not justified by the considerable resource expenditures they involve. (see pp.31-32)

The "return on investment" (ie. income assistance savings) was 2 1/4 and 2 years, respectively for Cyclebreak I and Cyclebreak II. The project appears to be less successful in providing an acceptable return to government funders.

The "for-profit" nature of the delivery agency appears to positively affect project effectiveness because it is quicker to change project delivery to better meet the needs of participants and funders. The for-profit agency is also very responsive to changing financial circumstances.

Unlike not-for-profit agencies, the owners of a for profit agency are required to monitor and deal with concerns about the sharing of the "revenue pie". These concerns have not affected Cyclebreak project delivery. With these concerns in mind Tully and Company is intent on developing among its staff a sense of ownership and commitment towards the business, "profit oriented" nature of the company. (see p.40)

6.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cyclebreak Project officials should collect in a more systematic / consistent manner data on the follow-up counselling they provide and its corresponding employment related effects.

2. Performance indicators need to be established for the Cyclebreak Project based on discussion between project officials and MSS&H.

3. Objectives should be established for the project under its current funding arrangements with MSS&H. In part, these objectives will assist in the identification of suitable performance indicators.

4. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on enhancing the effectiveness of the job placement component of the project to the meet the following objectives:

    - increase the number of participants who graduate from the placement to a paid job;

    - create demonstrable project effects in reducing income assistance dependency.

    This should involve increasing the support provided to placement hosts and the monitoring of participants' progress.

5. In conducting evaluations of employability enhancement projects like Cyclebreak, efforts should be made to collect comparison group data.

6. The Physical Activities component of the project should be reduced in size, but not completely eliminated.